APRIL 2014
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166 PRODUCTS REVIEWED!

# choice

## TESTS

- Media hubs
- E-readers
- Kettles
- Toasters
- Vacuum cleaners
- Washing machines
- Ovens
- TVs

**CHOCOLATE BLISS**
The budget buys topping our taste test

**GOOD BUY OR GOODBYE?**
Which appliances go the distance?

**BEST FACE FORWARD**
Botox and fillers 101

# Highway robbery

It's a stick up! The great pet insurance rip-off

# That time of year

## For many, Easter means chocolate and bunnies – and we've got both covered in this issue

Although hot cross buns have been on supermarket shelves since January, it's still hard to believe that Easter is almost upon us.

This brings us to the miracle of chocolate. The only chocolate brands I remember from my childhood are Cadbury, Nestle and Darrell Lea. But these days we're faced with an explosion of choice. Even in the local supermarket, decisions between Australian and imported, fair trade and non-fair trade, Belgian and private label are now everyday dilemmas for many consumers.

To help you with your selection, we decided to put a number of brands to the test. There was no shortage of CHOICE staff willing to volunteer for this job, but to share the fun, we also invited some CHOICE members and expert tasters to help us out. Find out more about what they liked (and didn't like) on page 20.

Chocolate bunnies may make us happy, but many people find the idea of testing cosmetics on rabbits distressing. Over the past 12 months, we've been zeroing in on the "cruelty-free" claims of major cosmetics companies – particularly those that trade in China, where animal testing is a standard part of the regulatory arrangements.

Imagine our surprise when, late last year, we received a tip off that The Body Shop products were on sale in China. We put Zoya Sheftalovich on a plane to Shanghai and Beijing, where she had no trouble buying official Body Shop products in airport stores. This means that the products were at risk of being removed and tested on animals by Chinese authorities – a risk that's inconsistent with the company's promise of being against animal testing. Read more about Zoya's investigation and The Body Shop's response on page 7.

If your interest in animals is a little closer to home, you've probably experienced the distress of an unexpected vet bill. Many people take out pet insurance to prepare for this situation. Our report (page 16) will take you through some of the tips and tricks of these products and help you to decide whether pet insurance is worth the premiums.

Finally, changes to our credit reporting laws kicked in during the last month, and everyone should read our report on page 33 to find out how to avoid trouble. Most credit providers will now be required to report late payments when they are made more than five days after the due date. This means it is more important than ever to know what's on your credit report and ensure that it's accurate. We tell you how to go about obtaining a free copy – something the credit reporting agencies make surprisingly difficult!

**Alan Kirkland, CEO**
**Email: alan@choice.com.au**
**Twitter: @AlanKirkland**

**For general membership & consumer enquiries, phone 1800 069 552**

### CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims. **SUBSCRIBE** To review the full range of membership benefits available to you, go to **choice.com.au/signup** and compare all our options for providing you access to our premium content across our website, mobile, tablet and print products. **SUBSCRIPTIONS/RENEWALS** Call 1800 069 552 or email us at **ausconsumer@choice.com.au**

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# CONTENTS


**4 Checkout**
News, views and product sneak peeks

**14 Your Say**

**16 Pet insurance**
The policies that will properly protect your pampered pooches and pussy cats

**20 Chocolate**
Our choco nuts are off their block for the best milk and dark varieties

**24 Anti-wrinkle treatments**
Is Botox right for you?

**27 Gluten-free foods**
Are you falling for a culinary con?

**30 Corporate sponsorship**
The dangers of big corporations wielding their wallets as weapons

**33 Credit reporting**
Why the new regime means closer scrutiny of your payment history

**36 Superannuation**
Gen Ys don't seem to care much about it – but they should

**38 Ask the Experts**

**75 Index**

**76 Hard Word**

**ON TEST**

**40 Product reliability**
The appliances and brands that stand the test of time – and the ones that don't

**47 Ovens**
The competition continues to heat up

**50 Toasters & kettles**
Start your day with a well-cooked breakfast

**56 Vacuum cleaners**
Have robots evolved to properly clean your carpets yet?

**60 Washing machines**
Be reliably informed about the best washer brands

**64 E-readers**
Have tablets caught up to dedicated devices?

**68 Hyundai ix35**
Should you jump on board?

**69 TVs**
The models that pass our screening process with flying colours

**72 Media hubs**
Moving content from your computer to a TV is a breeze with these devices


Are you paying a premium for something that's naturally gluten free? Find out on page 27

**CHOICE's Miranda Herron plays dietary detective**

BREAKING NEWS

## Autism link

Research of a US-based insurance claims database of 100 million patients has uncovered clusters, which seem to be linked to environmental factors, of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and intellectual disability (ID). The clustering also appears to be linked to state economic incentives for those diagnosed with ASD or ID. No specific environmental risk factors have yet been identified.

## Starry eyed

Analysis by CHOICE of popular food products using the Health Star Rating calculator has revealed significant differences in ratings for seemingly similar products. CHOICE helped develop the rating scheme along with industry and health groups, and a website with information about the scheme was controversially pulled down just hours after launching. The new ratings are due to start voluntarily rolling out from July.

## Scam alert

Overseas scammers appear to have hacked the websites of some small Australian lenders and used their access to extract payments from consumers for fictitious insurance or tax payments, ASIC has warned. Victims have lost thousands of dollars and did not receive their loans. ASIC advises that legitimate lenders normally collect any costs out of the loan proceedings.

➤ I SAY

## It's Chinatown

My partner and I recently went to China for a bit of a holiday, to see all the amazing growth that is going on in that country. I also had the old adage, "you get what you pay for", confirmed beyond all doubt there.

There are a lot of cheap goods in China, particularly Shanghai. But we found that if you buy cheap, don't expect it to last long. Like any other bargain marketplace in the world, the cheaper end of the market means great buys but more throwaway items.

In our particular case, for $6 we purchased a USB charger cord that splits into two phone chargers – one for Apple's most recent Lightning charger, and one for the normal Android phone charger point. We also bought a Bluetooth speaker that packed a punch of sound in the shop for $8, and an emergency phone battery charger, also for $8.

All three of these items failed within a week of getting home.

The cord failed first, stopping for no particular reason we could discern. The Bluetooth speaker stopped accepting a Bluetooth signal, making it essentially worthless. The emergency phone recharger lasted the longest, probably because we used it the least frequently. It managed about two per cent of the phone charge once before dying. It still lives, but we consider it pretty pointless at this stage.

What's the lesson? In Australia you're covered under the Australian Consumer Law, but if you buy no-name brands from no-name stores overseas, you have Buckley's chance of getting anything sorted should they go wrong (as they most likely will).

So if you want to throw your money away, these markets are perfect for that. But if you actually want to have functioning electronic goods, wait until you're back in Australia and covered and buythem here.

**MATTHEW STEEN**

## How's your broadband?

The federal government has launched a new site, MyBroadband, which allows people to see the broadband availability and quality ratings for their local area. The site is part of the government's plan to prioritise broadband improvement to areas that have poor services.

By logging on to mybroadband.communications.gov.au and entering your address, the site will list the availability of services including fibre, cable, ADSL and mobile broadband, as well as provide a rating from A to E according to what's available and the quality of services at that address.

**ROS PAGE**

## Uppin' your huffin' n' puffin'

Struggling to get in your 30 minutes of physical exercise five days a week as once recommended? It may come as a rude shock to hear you should now be doubling that to 60 minutes, according to the new physical activity guidelines.

The guidelines say we should be completing between 150 to 300 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. Fortunately, "moderate" doesn't mean slogging away at the gym for 45 minutes every day. It can include activities such as a brisk walk or dancing, household tasks like cleaning windows or raking leaves, and even pushing a stroller.

And the good news is, more vigorous activities that make you huff and puff, such as jogging, aerobics and fast cycling, count for double the amount of time, which means you only need to do 150 minutes of such activities to reach the revised target.

The new guidelines drawing on research suggest that while the previous recommendation was sufficient for general health benefits, a higher level of physical activity is needed in order to prevent weight gain and some cancers.

**JEMMA CASTLE**

## Deal or no deal?

Negotiations on the secretive Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade treaty will continue after the most recent meeting failed to result in a final agreement.

The high-level meeting in Singapore involving trade ministers was unable to resolve key issues around market access. It's expected that the next round of negotiations will coincide with US President Obama's visit to Asia in April, however this hasn't been confirmed.

CHOICE has criticised the TPP negotiations for their lack of transparency. Criticism has also been growing in the US where lawmakers are refusing to grant President Barack Obama so-called "fast-track" powers, instead insisting that Congress be able to participate in the negotiations.

In Australia, the Senate has called on the government to release the final TPP text before signing. However, Trade Minister Andrew Robb has indicated the final text will not be made public until after it is signed.

For more on the TPP, visit **choice.com.au/tpp**

**MADISON CARTWRIGHT**

## Fructose off the hook?

New research from the US has found there has been no change in the amount of fructose available since 1970, despite the monosaccharide often being named as one of the causes of skyrocketing obesity rates.

The research, published in *Nutrition Journal*, found that while the total amount of kilojoules available in the US food supply increased 10.7% during this time, there was no change in the amount of fructose available.

The study authors concluded that fructose was not a likely factor in promoting obesity. Instead, increased kilojoule consumption was probably due to greater availability of foods containing glucose, in particular in the form of carbohydrates from grains (up 24.2%), as well as fats and oils (up 25.3%). Obesity rates in the US have climbed from 13% in 1970 to 34% in 2009.

**MIRANDA HERRON**

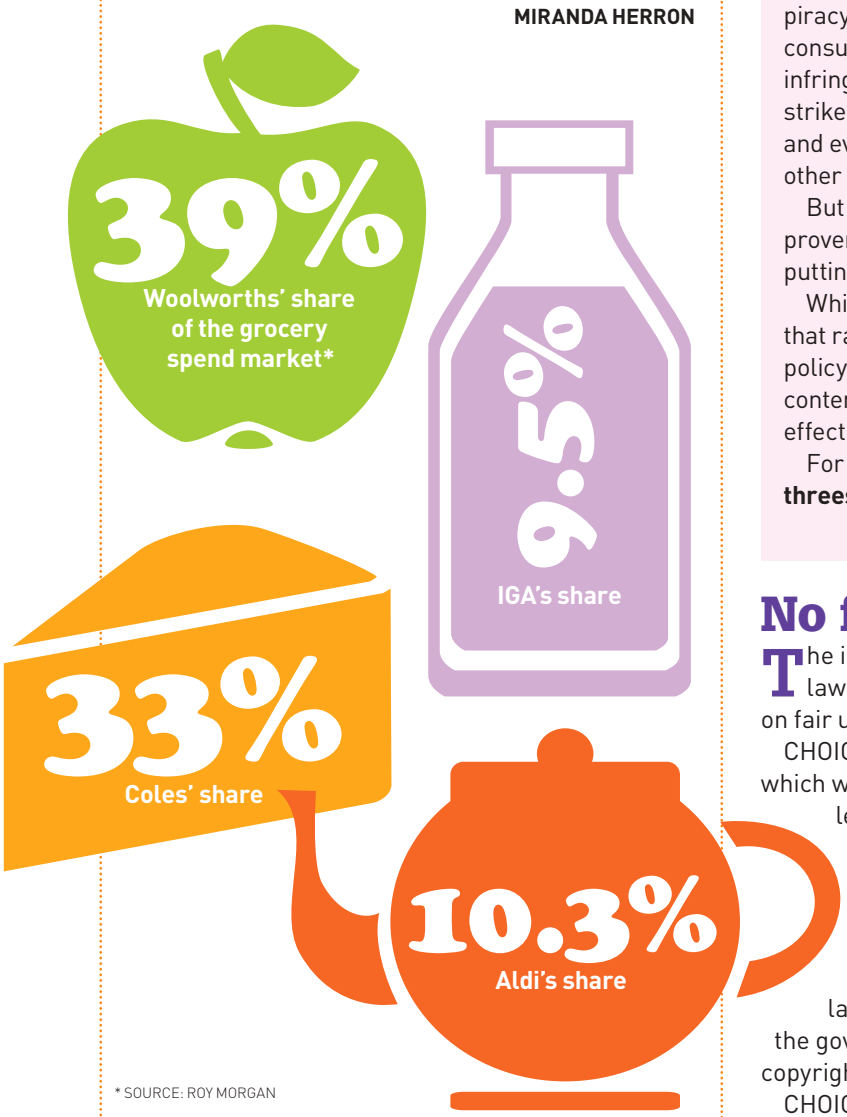
IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

## Aldi, the giant slayer

Aldi's share of shoppers is steadily creeping up behind Coles and Woolworths, with the German supermarket quadrupling its number over the past eight years from one million to 4.2 million. According to analysts at Roy Morgan, this suggests there are opportunities for other international supermarkets to enter the Australian grocery market too.

However, Aldi still has some way to go before it fully catches up with the big two. The retailer accounts for 10.3% of the dollars spent in the grocery market, compared with 39% for Woolworths. Coles has 33%, but its steady growth has seen it inching closer to Woolies over the past few years. IGA has 9.5% of the market.

**MIRANDA HERRON**




* SOURCE: ROY MORGAN

## Striking out

Federal Attorney-General George Brandis has indicated the government is considering introducing a policy aimed at reducing online piracy. Under the so-called "three strikes" policy, consumers receive up to two warnings for alleged infringement before being penalised on their third strike. This can include fines, reduced bandwidth and even having internet access terminated in other countries.

But there is concern that similar schemes have proven to be ineffective, costly and lack due process, putting consumer rights at risk.

While online piracy is a real issue, CHOICE believes that rather than an ineffective and costly three-strike policy, giving consumers better opportunities to buy content in a timely and convenient way is a more effective way to reduce piracy.

For more information, visit **choice.com.au/threestrikes**

**MADISON CARTWRIGHT**

## No fair!

The independent review of Australia's copyright laws has officially been released, with a focus on fair use.

CHOICE supports a switch to fair use copyright, which will allow consumers to use content they've legally acquired for personal use while protecting the markets for creators and artists at the same time.

Federal Attorney-General George Brandis is yet to be convinced that fair use is the best way forward, but agrees Australia's copyright laws need to be updated and simplified. He says the government is committed to implementing copyright reform in its first term.

CHOICE will continue to advocate for 21st-century copyright laws and fair use.

**MADISON CARTWRIGHT**

# CHOICE investigation pushes The Body Shop out of China

CHOICE found The Body Shop had expanded into China, putting products at risk of being tested on animals. Our investigation led the company to withdraw from the market. **Zoya Sheftalovich** reports

#COME CLEAN

And now for some good news. After CHOICE busted The Body Shop (TBS) selling products in duty-free shops in Beijing and Shanghai airports, the company said it would pull them from Chinese airport shelves immediately to investigate.

CHOICE's four-month investigation, conducted in Australia, China and the UK, found TBS, which is owned by L'Oreal, had deliberately entered the Chinese market. All cosmetics there run the risk of being tested on animals by government authorities.

## Entry into China hidden from consumers

TBS wasn't being upfront about the fact that its products are available in airports in mainland China. The company's Hong Kong website claimed products weren't sold anywhere in mainland China, and in May 2013, the CEO of TBS Australia, Mark Kindness, said they would not enter China until animal testing laws changed.

## What the law says

The Chinese government carries out random so-called "post-market" testing without warning. This involves pulling products from shop shelves to assess conformity with approved formulations. Products in duty-free stores are subject to this testing.

According to Chinese cosmetic industry insiders we spoke with, there is no way to guarantee that this testing regime doesn't include animal testing. "It is inconceivable that any foreign cosmetics company can bypass Chinese regulations and sell at the airports," said a representative of the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China. "The airports in Beijing [and] Shanghai are part of the Chinese territory that is subject to the same rules."

While this random post-market testing isn't automatically done on animals, it can be. So companies selling products in Chinese airports cannot guarantee their products will never be tested on animals.

## Other companies resist Chinese market

While TBS has taken advantage of the duty-free market in China, other companies have resisted. Emma Hart, a spokesperson for certified cruelty-free cosmetic brand Lush, which has a similar ethos to TBS, told us: "Even if you have an exemption from pre-market testing, there's still an opportunity once your products are on the shelves [that] they could be tested on animals. Post-market testing is something we're still not OK with. It's not guaranteed to happen, but the fact that it could happen is something we're not willing to risk as a company."

## Why is this important?

Many consumers are strongly opposed to animal testing, and don't want their cosmetic and personal care products to have any chance of being tested on animals. CHOICE believes information should be available so that those who want to choose products that aren't tested on animals can do so.

## What TBS Australia says

After the investigation was published, TBS Australia said: "[G]iven the questions that have arisen, we have temporarily removed the products until we can clarify the situation. In all cases, The Body Shop will not sell products if it would compromise one of its core beliefs, which is our opposition to animal testing."

**To read our full story, visit choice.com.au/thebodyshop**

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

# Making tracks

FIRST LOOK

The StickR TrackR is one of the thousands of tech products that started life as a Kickstarter project, and is now available online to help you find your lost stuff. It collects proximity and GPS data of anything you tend to leave around – or anything that others may find attractive – such as smartphones, tablets, and coffee mugs that work colleagues keep stealing.

Once you pair the device to the app via Bluetooth (you need to have a phone using iOS7 or Android 4.4), a GPS chip inside the TrackR shows the proximity of the device on the TrackR app. Alternatively, you can use the app to make the device beep if you're close by. If you can't find your phone, for example, you can press a button on the TrackR and make your phone ring. The app can also be set to notify you when you've moved away from the tracked item, such as when you leave your wallet and keys at a café.

Although the TrackR is quite small – about the same size as two one-dollar coins stuck together – in reality it's difficult to attach the TrackR unobtrusively to the device you wish to monitor. For example, if your phone were stolen, as opposed to lost, it would be easy for the thief to recognise the TrackR attached to it and simply step on it or, worse, leave it somewhere to lead you on a wild goose chase. Also, the device isn't a pinpoint locator – so don't expect to get any closer than twenty metres to the TrackR. So if the TrackR is attached to an object in a noisy area, you may not get close enough to physically see it or hear the beep.

A crowd-sourcing feature is an interesting concept that could add to the usefulness of the TrackR, provided enough people own the device or use the app. When an item goes missing with a TrackR device attached, all TrackR-enabled phones will begin to search for the item. If another user comes nearby, that user's phone will ping the TrackR server to update you on the new GPS coordinates.

Overall, however, we're not really convinced this device is as good in practice as it sounds in theory.

**DENIS GALLAGHER**

**STICKR TRACKR**
**PRICE** $10 (US$) for shipping and handling
**CONTACT** thetrackr.com

# Herbal horror

A coroner's report on the death of a Queensland woman in 2011 has revealed she died as a result of taking "herbal slimming tablets" she'd bought over the internet. The Asian herbal weight loss tablet is known commercially as The Slimming Factor, Easy Trim, Que She and Chinese Herbal Diet Pills.

Despite being labelled 100% herbal, testing of the tablets revealed they contain sibutramine, which has amphetamine-like effects on the heart, causing a rapid heartbeat, rising blood pressure and heart damage.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration issued an alert and a recall on the product in late December 2013 as they posed a serious health risk. The pills aren't listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods. Anyone who has these tablets is advised to stop taking them immediately.

**KATE BROWNE**

## Burn notice

First aid for burns is often inadequate and inappropriate, according to research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*. The best treatment is 20 minutes of cool running water within three hours of the burn occurring.

After reviewing more than 4000 burns cases at the Children's Hospital in Westmead, NSW, researchers found almost a third of children received too little, delayed or no treatment, and treatment that was often or might do more harm than good.

Common treatments included cold compresses, wet packs and ice packs and other pharmacy creams and ointments. All manner of bizarre food and bathroom products were applied in some cases, including toothpaste, yoghurt, soy sauce and plant oils such as tea tree oil. One patient even consulted a witch doctor!

So remember: 20 minutes of cool running water within three hours – and skip the witch doctor.

**KARINA BRAY**

## Trial by vaccine

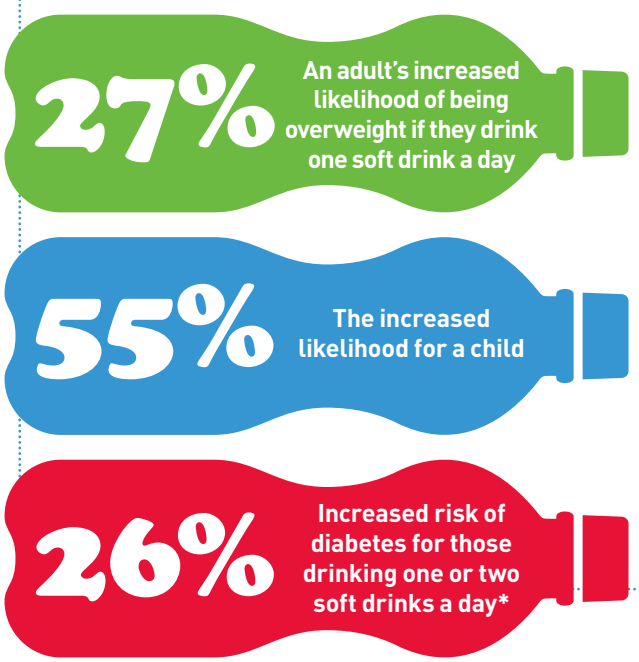
Queensland is running a trial this month that will see about 100 pharmacies administering the flu vaccine to adults. Pharmacists have been given the go-ahead to administer vaccinations subject to training, after the Pharmacy Board of Australia ruled it was within a pharmacist's scope of practice, despite safety concerns raised by GPs.

Dr Steve Hambelton, president of The Australian Medical Association, believes the trial should be stopped immediately. "Pharmacies have no proven record that they're safe or appropriate locations for such a private and potentially risky clinical procedure as vaccination," he says. There are also concerns around the management of anaphylaxis if it occurs.

But the Pharmacy Guild of Australia argues the scheme makes sense, as pharmacists dispense the vaccines anyway and that a focus on good training is key, which is what the data from the trial in Queensland will reveal.

**KATE BROWNE**

*SOURCE: SENATOR BILL MONNING


27%
An adult's increased likelihood of being overweight if they drink one soft drink a day
55%
The increased likelihood for a child
26%
Increased risk of diabetes for those drinking one or two soft drinks a day*

## Soda popped

California has introduced legislation that will require sugary drinks sold in that state to carry a warning label.

The law is, according to US Senator Bill Monning, the first of its kind in the country. "As with tobacco and alcohol warnings, this legislation will give Californians essential information they need to make healthier beverage choices," he says.

If the legislation passes, the proposed warning, which would state "STATE OF CALIFORNIA SAFETY WARNING: Drinking beverages with added sugar(s) contributes to obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay," will be required on the front of all beverage containers with added sweeteners that have 75 or more calories per 12 ounces (the equivalent of about 315 kilojoules in 355 millilitres).

**ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

# The CHOICE Valentine's Day competition

Thank you to the hundreds of CHOICE members who took the time to share their stories of Valentine's Day gifts gone wrong. We've had a lot of fun and laughs reading through all your entries, but there could only be one winner.

## We congratulate **Rhonda Leske, a CHOICE Plus member from SA!**

### Rhonda's winning entry

**"I was horrified when I was given fluffy pink crotchless knickers, and tried to toss them out. However, my granny mistook them for something quite different and took them home. When I next visited her, she made me a cuppa – and there on her teapot was her new, fluffy pink 'tea-cosy'!"**

Rhonda wins CHOICE's top-rated Breville The Barista Express espresso machine, valued at $800.

## Here are some more favourites

"I got a package of hammer, nails, tape and glue in early February. Thinking it was a joke gift, I received a call on 14 Feb explaining that the package may assist in mending a broken heart, as she went on to break up with me. Perhaps the best gift!"

**Greg Connor**
**CHOICE Online member, NSW**

"I was given 100 laying chooks. Have you ever tried to get rid of that many eggs each day? I was giving away eggs to everyone in Gunnedah. I finally had to give away the culprits – couldn't bring myself to eat them."

**Deidre Bowes**
**CHOICE Online member, NSW**

"I was meeting a man I had just started dating (but was already head over heels for) at Neil Perry's Rockpool. I handed him a handmade gift of vegan cookies, made with love. In return, he handed me a used copy of *He's Just Not That Into You*."

**Nadia Hassan**
**CHOICE Online member, Qld**

"As a teenager (I'm now 43), each year I received an anonymous Valentine's Day card. I would always try and guess about who had sent me a lovely card and message. About 10 years ago, my mother confessed it was her all along!"

**Marnie Elliott**
**CHOICE Online member, Vic**

"A cement mixer arrived with a red bow. Our house had just been built, and the only major job to complete was the 150 square metres of verandahs. My husband was working away at the time on the other side of Australia. The card read, 'Just something to keep you fit for my return!'"

**Traude Jupe**
**CHOICE Plus member, WA**

"After many hints about receiving a Tiffany's 'blue box with 24 carats', I was taken way too literally and given a blue box with 24 carrots!"

**Nicole McClure**
**CHOICE Online member, Qld**

## Serve it up!

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is proposing to make changes to its nutritional information panel on packaged foods to bring it in line with the latest public health trends and research on nutrition and disease. The proposed changes would require serving size standards to be updated to reflect how much Americans actually eat and drink rather than what they should eat.

CHOICE believes a move towards realistic serving sizes (in addition to their standardised serving sizes) puts the US even further ahead of Australia. Here, serving sizes aren't standarised and are often set arbitrarily by manufacturers. For products that are more than one serving size, but that could be consumed in a single sitting, calorie and nutrition information for the whole pack would also be required. The US doesn't, however, require manufacturers to include nutritional information per 100 grams.

In addition, the changes would require "added sugars" to be listed on the label as an indent to total sugars, so that naturally occurring and added sugars are both identified.

**JEMMA CASTLE**

## Quick to threaten

Quick response (QR) codes are a security hazard, according to internet security experts from Murdoch University.

QR codes can inadvertently load malware onto a smartphone or be used to subscribe people to unwanted services, such as premium SMS. QR codes show a graphic that is "read" by the phone's camera to link to a site, but the URL for the site isn't shown in the image.

To avoid scams, researchers suggest protective measure such as:

- using a QR code reader app to preview the website address before proceeding to the site
- using an anti-malware app from a well-known internet security company.

**ROS PAGE**

## Corralling the big four

A recent poll commissioned by the Customer Owned Banking Association (COBA), the industry body for credit unions, building societies, mutuals and friendly societies, has found 75% of Australians want the government's Financial System Inquiry to look into the outsized market share of the big four banks. More than half of the 1000 survey respondents didn't believe CBA, NAB, ANZ or Westpac engaged in genuine competition, and 70% thought regulatory steps should be taken. The research also revealed confusion about sub-brands, e.g. only 52% knew that St George Bank is owned by Westpac. COBA CEO Louise Petschler said the results are further proof that the "the system must change to create a level playing field for smaller players". The inquiry is expected to deliver its final report in November. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

# Memory drink? Forget it

Hopes were raised when a new "medical drink" targeting symptoms of early Alzheimer's disease hit the market. But the benefits appear to have been oversold, reports **Karina Bray**

Souvenaid is a "medical drink" promoted by its makers Nutricia as a "clinically proven" treatment for early Alzheimer's disease (AD) – for which there's currently no cure. It contains nutrients from food such as broccoli, tomatoes and fish – foods often found in a Mediterranean diet found to help prevent or delay memory loss.

Several key Australian geriatricians and psychiatrists have expressed public support for Souvenaid, though others have been more sceptical. However, three studies of the drink, funded and co-authored by Nutricia or its parent company Danone, haven't proven it makes a notable improvement in everyday life. The federal government's National Prescribing Service (NPS) concurs, finding there is no evidence that Souvenaid "has any effect in decreasing the rate of cognitive decline or delaying AD progression". The NPS noted there may be an effect on some aspects of memory performance in early disease, but other reviewers noted that while these results may be of interest to statisticians, they were irrelevant for patients and practitioners.

Importantly, some of these publicly quoted experts were recruited by Nutricia as members of its advisory board. Commenting in the medical press, these experts were able to discuss the potential of the product to pharmacists and GPs.

Nutricia has also provided funding for Alzheimer's Australia (AA), the peak body for advocacy and support for people with AD. AA, with government funding, has published a fact sheet on Souvenaid, which while not a ringing endorsement for the product, tends to emphasise its potential positives while downplaying the lack of evidence for its usefulness. For example, it speculates that the lack of observable effects may have been because the product "is working "behind the scenes" to support brain function".

Long-time consumer health advocate Dr Ken Harvey lodged a complaint about claims relating to Souvenaid with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), arguing the claims breached several regulations of the therapeutic goods advertising code. However, Nutricia having declared this was a "food for special medical purposes" rather than a listed therapeutic product, the TGA forwarded the complaint to the NSW Food Authority. This was in May 2013, but as we went to press the complaint still hadn't been addressed.

This saga is a great example of what happens when there's a conflict of interest between a sponsor – this case Nutricia – and the people in a position to influence take up of the sponsor's product – the medical specialists and AA.

**Souvenaid's recommended retail price makes it an expensive experiment for individuals with AD**

We've explored more examples of how corporate sponsors get bang for their buck in our story on page 30, where we also discuss why industry-funded research is problematic.

For consumers, meanwhile, its recommended retail price of $4.16 per drink per day recommended for a minimum of three months make it an expensive experiment for individuals with AD – especially given the product has no proven benefit for everyday life. As such, it would seem prudent to wait for better – and independent – evidence of its effectiveness before it's recommended to consumers.

## Selfie super concerns

Australia's pension pool has grown faster than any other country's to become the world's fourth largest behind the US, UK, and Japan, according to a study by Tower Watson. And a Financial Services Council report says these savings will reduce our dependence on overseas investment and may increase ownership of Australian assets.

However, Credit Suisse is concerned about the growth of self-managed super funds (SMSF) that now have 16% of Australia's equity market. The financial services giant says SMSFs are retarding growth in Australia by controlling the investment of funds. Rather than funding new growth, it argues, SMSFs demand dividends and Australian businesses respond by cutting costs instead of using the funds to grow business.

Credit Suisse uses the example of the big banks reducing headcounts by 2000 over the past year and transferring Australian jobs overseas. It says SMSFs may need to be taken off shareholder registers so Australian companies can generate capital expenditure. **JODI BIRD**

## Protein baby, yeah!

Researchers at Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research in Victoria have made a breakthrough discovery that may revolutionise fertility treatments and explain why some women become infertile at an early age.

The researchers identified the key building blocks of BMP15, a fertility protein required for normal ovulation. BMP15 is produced by a woman's eggs and controls the maturing process and release of an egg during ovulation.

Genetic mutations can deactivate the BMP15 protein and have been associated with premature menopause and infertility.

The discovery of the building blocks essential for ovulation could lead to exciting new fertility treatments.

**JEMMA CASTLE**

## Carbon tax watchdog

The ACCC will formally monitor the repeal of the carbon tax, due in July this year, to ensure companies behave after the tax is repealed. The watchdog will be keeping an eye on suppliers of regulated goods such as natural gas, electricity and synthetic greenhouse gases, and the approximately 400 corporations that had to pay the tax under the Clean Energy Act.

"The price monitoring role will leave the ACCC well placed to tackle any price exploitation that may occur post-repeal," says ACCC chair, Rod Sims. "We're simply collecting information and monitoring the pricing practices of specific entities so we can fully understand the impact of the carbon tax both before and after the anticipated repeal."

**ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

## Moisturiser could save million$

Using moisturiser twice a day could halve the incidence of skin tears in elderly people, according to Australian research.

As we age our skin gets thinner, and tears relatively easily. Catching the corner of a table, for example, or scraping against a stick in the garden can cause tears that may develop into chronic, non-healing wounds.

Applied twice daily to arms, hands, legs and feet, this simple and cheap – yet highly effective – preventative treatment could dramatically reduce the annual health care cost of skin tears and chronic wounds, currently $2.6b per annum, and improve quality of life.

The moisturiser should be good quality, but doesn't have to be expensive – ask your pharmacist to recommend one. **KARINA BRAY**

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

# Your Say

**We want to hear from you. If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity.**

## Contact us!

Email us at **yoursay@choice.com.au** or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

## Smashed by the cost

Your story on smash repairs (*CHOICE*, Mar 14) was relevant to a recent experience of mine. I reversed in a confined space and touched a vehicle on my left. My mudguard needed no repair as far as I could see, while the other car's damage was confined to the paint only with no dent. Nonetheless, "repair" to my vehicle cost $1300, and more than $3000 to the other – not huge amounts, but far more than seemed reasonable.

This is not the first time I've encountered this. It seems to me there must be collusion between insurers and repairers in a tit-for-tat arrangement that maximises profits.

Who's going to go out on a limb to clear up this racket?

**Kevin Orr, Blakehurst, NSW**

## Dyson sucks again

When I saw the headline to Peter Thornley's letter: "Vacuum after sales service that sucks" (*CHOICE*, Mar 14), I thought: "That will be Dyson" – and I wasn't wrong.

I have a Dyson vacuum cleaner that was under warranty when one of the attachments failed. It has a brush head that had become so soft it was being sucked into the nozzle, thereby completely blocking it. I called Dyson to ask for a replacement as the attachment had had very little use before failing. I was met with an aggressive and unhelpful "customer service" representative who told me it was my fault for using the vacuum at full power. She said it was designed to be used on the lower of the adjustable settings – which raises the question of why anyone would bother buying a powerful Dyson, not to mention the question of why Dyson would develop such a pointless product.

The representative told me the warranty wouldn't cover a replacement, but I could buy one if I chose. I declined the offer and called NSW Fair Trading, who issued a case number and told me to advise Dyson that a case had been raised. I sent an email to Dyson, and within half an hour my phone was ringing.

This time a senior customer service rep told me there should never have been any question of a warranty claim being challenged and that the part would be sent out in the next post. She asked me to withdraw the Fair Trading case, which I agreed to do, but I pointed out that in the meantime I'd posted the story on a number of "not happy" websites. She asked me to withdraw these but I refused, arguing the service had been poor and was therefore worth recording online for others to take note.

A few days later, my part arrived plus another accessory they had sent as a "gift". What a pity Dyson decided to make a fight over a $15 part rather than honour their warranty, and what an indictment of their service when it takes the threat of intervention from Fair Trading before they act responsibly.

**Dave Kennerley, Byron Bay, NSW**

"Can a company pretend I have no warranty rights if I don't fill in their marketing form?"

# A question of warranty

**LETTER OF THE MONTH**

We recently bought a portable Engel Fridge-Freezer. It's showing every sign of being a good buy so far. However, I noticed the warranty documentation that came with it says: "Warranty is not valid unless this portion is completed and posted within 14 days of the purchase."

I then looked at the questions they were asking – my age, my intended use, my vehicle make and model etc. I thought that if they wanted marketing information from me, they should pay for it.

So I decided to explore the online registration option instead. Most of the questions there were in a separate, optional questionnaire. That's more like it! So I left the questionnaire and filled in the warranty. I didn't think my age was any of their business, so I left it blank. Guess what? It wouldn't accept it without my age. By then I had spent far too much completely unnecessary time, so I put in an (arbitrary) age.

Success! But I was left wondering who keeps these corporates honest. Is it an offence to pretend that information they have no right to demand is required, or that I have no warranty rights if I don't fill in their form?

**Steen Olsen, Modbury North, SA**

**CHOICE SAYS** *As always, manufacturers are out to extract as much customer information as possible, either for their own marketing purposes or to onsell at a profit. We strongly doubt that declining to give your age, giving a false age or not registering a product within 14 days would void your manufacturer's warranty. And we're certain it wouldn't void your rights under Australian Consumer Law, which supersede the company warranty regardless of any paperwork you're asked to fill in. The trouble is, many manufacturers and retailers blithely ignore this fact.*

## Thumbs

We bought an ADP Blue Australia vanity about 10 years ago from Harvey Norman. The vanity still looks new, except the handles have lost some of the metal coating. I rang the company and asked if we could get replacement handles, not expecting too much after 10 years. However, their extremely friendly customer service rep asked for the model of the vanity and size of the handles and promised to post free of charge. We received the handles two days later by express mail, and they fit perfectly. Very impressive!

**Eva & Rudy Liedermann, Baulkham Hills, NSW**

One of the paper towel support brackets of my Leifheit kitchen dispenser recently broke. Although the statutory warranty on this product had expired, the distributor, Supertex Industries, provided me with a new pair of support brackets quickly and at no cost. Excellent customer service.

**Bill Lindsay, Kaleen, ACT**

Methven Australia replaced my Satinjet hand shower hand piece when the seal around the edge became faulty and started dribbling rather than showering. Methven honoured their domestic use lifetime warranty, and a new handpiece was sent out within two days once I provided proof of purchase to Methven (thanks to our builder Creative Building's meticulous archive of purchase dockets – a thumbs up to them too). I was already very happy with the shower and the builder; I'm even happier now.

**Craig Horley, Curtin, ACT**

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

# Heavy petting

How will you pay for Mittens' kidney failure or Scooby's extraction from a carpet python? **Jodi Bird** reviews your options

Your pets are part of your family, but don't expect their health insurance to be as generous as it is with human family members. Off the back of our last review (*CHOICE*, Oct 11), ASIC looked into product disclosure statements (PDS) for pet insurance policies and decided some insurers were blurring the fine print.

## The more things change…

ASIC found several insurers don't make clear that they exclude cover for diseases for which there is a known vaccination, even if your pet has been vaccinated but still contracts the disease. Nor was it clear they exclude cover for conditions that existed before the policy was purchased, even if your pet had recovered many years before. And some don't disclose that consumers need to make co-payments and pay excess in the event of a claim.

The insurers agreed to address these issues, but consumers are still unhappy with some aspects. As pet insurance continues to be taken up in Australia, CHOICE has heard several complaints from distraught pet owners who have (for example) been forced to pay premiums for the remainder of the policy period, in cases where they had made a claim but their pet passed away.

**Several insurers don't make clear that they exclude cover for diseases for which there's a known vaccination**

## Exclusions, exclusions

It would be pretty outrageous if you had to keep paying premiums on your relative's health insurance after they died. But this is exactly what can happen with pet insurance.

John Price, lead ombudsman with the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS), told us the extent of what your pet is covered for and which exclusions apply are common causes for pet insurance disputes. In particular, pre-existing conditions are generally excluded for the lifetime of your pet. This differs to your own health insurance, where pre-existing condition exclusions are waived after a waiting period, usually of between two and 12 months.

For this reason, there's little scope for switching insurance policies during your pet's lifetime. If you do, any conditions your pet suffered from before the start of the new policy will be excluded.

And the definition of pre-existing conditions can be broad. If, for example, your pet had a rash before the start of the policy and is diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver later in life, it could be excluded as a pre-existing condition since the rash may have been an early symptom of the disease.

**117.8**
Number of FOS disputes per 100,000 for Petsure

**19.8**
Number of disputes per 100,000 for Petplan

## BAD CLAIMS

There was a significant increase in disputes lodged with FOS in the 2012-13 financial year. Two primary reasons were cited for this increase:

- Increased take-up of pet insurance and an associated rise in complaints.
- A software glitch with one of the insurers leading to technical errors.

Petsure confirmed with CHOICE that the software glitch is an issue they had when changing IT systems in 2012 that caused delays and errors in the processing of claims. They assured us this situation has been rectified. FOS agrees, saying it expects to see a levelling out or even a reduction in complaints this year.

# BUYER BEWARE

**Keep these points in mind when selecting your pet's insurance policy.**

### Buy right, buy early

The earlier you insure your pet, the better – a puppy is likely to have far fewer pre-existing conditions than a mature dog. As always, read the PDS carefully to ensure you get the best cover for your pet.

### Co-payments

Most of the pet insurance policies in our review have some kind of co-payment. The insurer pays a fixed percentage of costs up to the annual maximum benefit, and you pay the rest. For most policies, the insurer will pay from 70% to 85%, while some insurers, such as Guide Dogs, have policies with no co-payments initially but then introduce a co-payment as your pet ages.

### Increasing premiums

Most policies increase premiums for older animals. We've given indicative prices for a couple of three- and eight-year-old pets in our comparative tables (page 18), but bear in mind premiums are specific to the species as well as the breed.

### Routine care

Routine care can be seen as a form of "extras" insurance for your pet, so our advice for health insurance extras applies here. It's subject to a maximum benefit and sub-limits per treatment, so it should be treated as a budget management tool to spread your expenditure over time.

Have a look at the regular costs you would incur for your pet and weigh them against the potential benefits received versus the premiums you pay to decide if it's worth it. One of the policies we look at, for example, costs an additional $60 per year but provides a total maximum benefit of only $80, so you really want to make sure you're using all of your benefits to get value out of your premium.

### Ongoing conditions

Limited cover for ongoing conditions was a major bugbear in our previous review. However, most policies now cover chronic or recurring conditions, with the exception of Petplan Essential. This policy covers illness or injury for 12 months from the date of first occurrence after you obtained cover and serve the 21-day waiting period. After 12 months there will be no cover for any further claims related to that injury or illness.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

# FUZZY CLAIMS

**The FOS advises consumers to question your insurer when faced with one of the following fuzzy denials of your claim:**

- Your pet suffers injury from an accident such as a fall or a blow and the claim is denied because of pre-existing conditions.
- The insurer relies on a "whole of body" or bilateral exclusion. Under these types of exclusions, if your pet has a problem in one eye (for example), both eyes are excluded from any further cover.

If you intend to dispute a claim, always address it with your insurer first. If a resolution isn't reached there, escalate it to the FOS.

## The lowdown

Most pet insurance policies are for cats and dogs only, so that's what we cover. Equine policies are available for Phar Lap, but if you want to insure Phil the ferret your options are limited – try petplanlivestock.com.au

We've broken down the market into the below categories. See our tables for a policy comparison.

**ACCIDENT ONLY**
Covers accidents only, not illness, subject to the usual benefit limitations.

**ACCIDENT & ILLNESS**
These are the most common policies with coverage subject to annual benefit limits.

**ACCIDENT, ILLNESS & ROUTINE CARE**
Routine care provides limited annual benefits for routine care treatments such as micro-chipping, teeth cleaning, council registration fees and desexing. But most policies, only cover one of these treatments in addition to a few minor benefits for things like a heartworm test or urinalysis. It's available as an add-on to many of the accident and illness policies.

| ACCIDENT & ILLNESS | | PERFORMANCE | | PREMIUMS ($) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Cat | |
| Brand (FSP)* | Plan | Overall score (%) | Events covered score (%) | 3-year-old | 8-year-old |
| **Petplan** (PP) | Dog/Cat Ultimate | 96/91 | 88 | 425 | 437 |
| **Guide Dogs** (PP) | Dog/Cat Supreme | 91/84 | 97 | 383 | 383 |
| **Petplan** (PP) **(A)** | Dog/Cat Classic | 87/85 | 88 | 316 | 316 |
| **Guide Dogs** (PP) | Dog/Cat Standard | 83/77 | 97 | 323 | 323 |
| **Guide Dogs** (PP) | Dog/Cat Budget | 76/75 | 97 | 287 | 287 |
| **Petplan** (PP) | Dog/Cat Essential | 73/74 | 79 | 213 | 213 |
| **Prime** (PS) | Imperial | 64 | 48 | 481 | 744 |
| **HCF** (PS) | Pet Premium | 62 | 45 | 329 | 623 |
| **ProSure** (PS) | Gold Cover | 62 | 48 | 387 | 615 |
| **Pet Insurance Australia** (PS) | Comprehensive Cover | 60 | 39 | 400 | 583 |
| **Bow Wow Meow** (PS) | Comprehensive Plan | 58 | 39 | 458 | 609 |
| **Medibank** (PS) | Silver Paw Cover | 58 | 39 | 382 | 543 |
| **Guardian** (PS) | Gold | 57 | 39 | 386 | 597 |
| **InsuranceLine** (PS) | Accidental Injury and Illness Cover | 57 | 39 | 425 | 675 |
| **Petinsurance.com.au** (PS) | Plus Cover | 57 | 39 | 398 | 566 |
| **RSPCA** (PS) | Economy Cover | 57 | 39 | 390 | 604 |
| **Woolworths** (PS) | Standard Cover | 57 | 39 | 356 | 474 |
| **Real Insurance** (PS) | Standard | 57 | 39 | 409 | 596 |
| **1300 Pet Protect** (PS) | Comprehensive Cover | 56 | 39 | 355 | 473 |
| **PetSecure** (PS) | Accidental Injury and Illness Cover | 52 | 39 | 376 | 514 |
| **AFS- PetMed** (PS) | Plan B | 43 | 39 | 560 | 797 |

| ACCIDENT ONLY | | PERFORMANCE | PREMIUMS ($) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Cat | | Labrador | | | |
| Brand* | Plan | Overall score (%) | 3-year-old | 8-year-old | 3-year-old | 8-year-old | Annual benefit | Co-payment |
| **InsuranceLine** | Accidental Injury Cover | 45 | 254 | 254 | 298 | 298 | 10,000 | 80% |
| **Prime** | Royal | 45 | 362 | 362 | 388 | 388 | 10,000 | 80% |
| **Bow Wow Meow** | Accidental Injury Cover | 44 | 207 | 207 | 243 | 243 | 8000 | 80% |
| **Guardian** | Silver | 44 | 298 | 298 | 319 | 319 | 8000 | 80% |
| **Medibank** | Bronze Paw Cover | 44 | 204 | 204 | 218 | 218 | 8000 | 80% |
| **HCF** | Pet Essentials | 44 | 212 | 212 | 249 | 249 | 8000 | 80% |
| **Pet Insurance Australia** | Accidental Injury Cover | 44 | 190 | 190 | 216 | 216 | 8000 | 80% |
| **RSPCA** | Basic Cover | 44 | 293 | 293 | 322 | 322 | 7000 | 80% |
| **Real Insurance** | Accidental | 44 | 299 | 299 | 329 | 329 | 8000 | 80% |
| **ProSure** | Silver Cover | 44 | 168 | 168 | 197 | 197 | 8000 | 80% |
| **Petinsurance.com.au** | Basic Cover | 43 | 164 | 164 | 185 | 185 | 6000 | 80% |
| **Woolworths** | Basic Cover | 43 | 157 | 157 | 168 | 168 | 6000 | 80% |
| **1300 Pet Protect** | Accident Protect | 42 | 150 | 150 | 166 | 166 | 6000/10,000 | 75% |
| **PetSecure** | Accidental Injury Cover | 41 | 202 | 202 | 230 | 230 | 8000 | 75%; 85% |
| **AFS- PetMed** | Plan A | 29 | 305 | 305 | 344 | 344 | 7500 | 75%; 85% |

| Labrador | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3-year-old | 8-year-old | Annual benefit | Co-payment | Age co-payment # |
| 927 | 1,154 | 20,000/15,000 | 100% | |
| 719 | 719 | 20,000/15,000 | 100% | 65% |
| 520 | 944 | 10,000/9,000 | 100% | |
| 599 | 599 | 15,000/10,000 | 100% | 65% |
| 539 | 539 | 10,000/9,000 | 100% | 65% |
| 520 | 645 | 7,000 | 100% | 80% |
| 818 | 1,211 | 14,000 | 80% | |
| 623 | 989 | 12,000 | 80% | |
| 614 | 976 | 12,500 | 80% | |
| 577 | 839 | 15,000 | 80% | |
| 733 | 975 | 8,000/12,000 | 80% | |
| 690 | 982 | 12,000 | 80% | |
| 716 | 1,055 | 12,000 | 75% | |
| 674 | 675 | 10,000 | 80% | |
| 560 | 796 | 10,000 | 80% | |
| 724 | 984 | 11,000 | 75% | |
| 571 | 759 | 10,000 | 80% | |
| 654 | 945 | 12,000 | 75% | |
| 466 | 619 | 10,000/15,000 | 75% | |
| 542 | 789 | 12,000 | 75%; 85% | |
| 788 | 1,121 | 13,500 | 70%; 80% | 60%; 70% |

Quotes are valid as of 12 March 2014 and based on lowest available excess for all polices. **#** Age co-payment starts at 5 for AFS_PetMed; 10 (7 for selected dog breeds) for Guidedogs; Petplan 12 for cats and 9 (7 for selected breeds) for dogs. **(A)** Optional benefits of $9000 & $10,000 for cat and $10,000 & $15,000 for dog. Premiums stated are for the lower benefit levels *** FSP** Financial services provider. **PP** = Petplan; **PS** = Petsure. Petsure is the FSP for all routine and accident-only policies.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

| ACCIDENT, ILLNESS & ROUTINE CARE | | PERFORMANCE | PREMIUMS ($) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Cat | | Labrador | | | |
| Brand* | Plan | Routine score (%) | 3-year-old | 8-year-old | 3-year-old | 8-year-old | Annual benefit | Co-payment |
| **1300 Pet Protect** | Comprehensive Protect plus Routine | 83 | 487 | 604 | 598 | 751 | 10,165/15,165 | 75% |
| **Bow Wow Meow** | Comprehensive Plan plus Routine Care | 76 | 572 | 723 | 847 | 1,089 | 8145/12,145 | 80% |
| **HCF** | Pet Premium Plus Routine Care | 76 | 506 | 737 | 737 | 1,103 | 12,145 | 80% |
| **InsuranceLine** | Accidental Injury, Illness and Routine Care Cover | 76 | 539 | 789 | 788 | 1,185 | 10,145 | 80% |
| **Medibank** | Gold Paw Cover | 76 | 569 | 740 | 896 | 1205 | 15,165 | 80% |
| **Petinsurance.com.au** | Premium Cover | 76 | 566 | 757 | 749 | 1,018 | 15,145 | 80% |
| **Pet Insurance Australia** | Major Medical cover | 76 | 514 | 697 | 691 | 953 | 15,145 | 80% |
| **PetSecure** | Accidental Injury, Illness and Routine Care Cover | 70 | 490 | 627 | 656 | 903 | 12,145 | 75%; 85% |
| **AFS – PetMed** | Plan B + Option 1 | 66 | 674 | 911 | 902 | 1,235 | 13,635 | 70%; 80% |
| **ProSure** | Platinum Cover | 55 | 507 | 735 | 734 | 1,096 | 14,650 | 80% |
| **Guardian** | Platinum | 48 | 478 | 708 | 776 | 1,115 | 12,080 | 80% |
| **Prime** | Sovereign | 48 | 587 | 876 | 962 | 1,388 | 14,080 | 85% |
| **Real Insurance** | Premium | 48 | 506 | 718 | 773 | 1122 | 12,080 | 80% |
| **RSPCA** | Ultimate Cover | 48 | 483 | 716 | 784 | 1126 | 11,080 | 80% |
| **Woolworths** | Comprehensive Cover | 44 | 471 | 589 | 685 | 873 | 12,100 | 80% |

# Block busters

**Jemma Castle** breaks apart the best from the worst chocolate blocks on the supermarket shelves

If, like many people – including the CHOICE members and staffers we recruited for our taste test – you've got a sweet tooth or are a fully fledged chocoholic, you'll find you're spoilt for choice with the range of products on supermarket shelves. So how can you know which ones will provide the most satisfying choco fix?

To find out, we tasted 11 plain milk chocolates and 13 plain dark chocolates. With the exception of Haigh's Premium Chocolates (included to provide a comparison with a boutique brand), all the chocolates in our test are available at the supermarket, ranging in price from $1.25 to $4 per 100 grams.

We certainly found some standout products – good and bad. That said, chocolate is a highly personal treat. Even our expert chocolate tasters (see below) couldn't agree among themselves which were good and which weren't. But while it seems we can't all agree on what we like, we certainly can agree on what we don't like.

## Milk chocolate

### OVERALL WINNER

**7.5** CHOICE panel

**7.3** Experts

**Lindt Excellence Extra Creamy Milk Chocolate**
Price (per 100g): $3.89

On average, our CHOICE panel and experts agreed this was the best of the bunch, with 27% of the panel saying it was their favourite. The experts agreed the texture was creamy and smooth.
*"Melts quickly but a slimy texture. Good caramel notes."* – Jodie
*"Nice, strong aroma. Good balance of milk and sweetness. My favourite of the range."* – Rebecca

The CHOICE panel also said this had a good balance between sweetness and flavour, and was light and fruity with a good chocolate flavour and creamy, smooth texture with a good melt.
*"Everything you can ask for in a milk chocolate – flavour, sweetness, creamy. Yum."* – CHOICE panellist

**OUR VERDICT** A good all-rounder that ticks all the boxes for a milk chocolate. But it's also one of the most expensive ones we found at the supermarket.

### MEET THE EXPERTS

**Jodie Van Der Velden** is the chief judge at the Sydney Royal chocolate competition and owns Josophan's Fine Chocolates.

**Tina Vamvoukakis** founded Sydney's Adora Handmade Chocolates. She has made chocolates for almost 20 years.

**Rebecca Kerswell** owns Coco Chocolates in Sydney.

**The tasters scored on appearance, aroma, texture and taste**

L-R: CHOICE voting members Paul Szilard, Fiona Horton, Martin Hirst, Frances Watson, Peter Dajmovich, Simone Tannock and Ali Torbaty

## HOW WE TEST

A panel of CHOICE staffers and members tasted the chocolates along with three experts. The 11 milk chocolates on test were tasted by 31 panellists and the 13 dark chocolates were tasted by 32. Brand names were disguised as best as possible. Dark chocolates were tasted in order of lowest to highest cocoa content so as not to disadvantage the sweeter ones. Each tester gave the chocolates an average score from 1-10, taking into consideration appearance, aroma, texture and taste.

## CHEAP & CHEERFUL

6.8 CHOICE panel

5.7 Experts

### Coles Milk Chocolate

Price (per 100g): $1.35

At less than half the price of the Lindt Excellence Extra Creamy Milk Chocolate, this was a close runner-up for the CHOICE panel, with 22% saying it was their favourite. It came in equal third among the experts.
*"OK for a mass-manufactured chocolate, but little depth of flavour."* – Jodie

The CHOICE panel liked this on the whole. They felt it had a smooth, creamy texture but lacked cocoa flavour and noted that it tasted "commercial".
*"This was nice, inoffensive chocolate. It doesn't taste particularly gourmet but it was nice enough."* – CHOICE panellist

**OUR VERDICT** A good-value alternative.

## THE LOSERS

4.7 CHOICE panel

4 Experts

### Haigh's Milk Chocolate

Price (per 100g): $9.50

At $9.50 per 100 grams, up to seven times the price of the supermarket chocolates, you'd expect this one to stand out. But it came second last with the CHOICE panel, and the experts didn't rate it highly either.
*"Grainy/sandy texture and mouthfeel. Strong vanilla, creamy taste."* – Jodie

**OUR VERDICT** You can do better for much less.

3.4 CHOICE panel

3 Experts

### Woolworths Select Milk Chocolate

Price (per 100g): $1.35

A standout loser. The experts thought it was overly sweet, lacked flavour and aroma and had a grainy texture.
*"Good if you are on a diet – it's so awful you'll only eat one piece."*
– CHOICE panellist

**OUR VERDICT** Don't waste your money.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK | *BASED ON THE PRICE WE PAID AT SYDNEY SUPERMARKETS IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2014.

| MILK CHOCOLATE | Experts' average score | Jodie's score | Tina's score | Rebecca's score | CHOICE panel's score | Price per 100g* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Lindt** Excellence Extra Creamy Milk Chocolate | 7.3 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 7.5 | $3.89 |
| **Green & Black's** Organic Milk Chocolate | 6.7 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 4.7 | $4.00 |
| **Coles** Milk Chocolate | 5.7 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6.8 | $1.35 |
| **Just Organic** Milk Chocolate (Aldi) | 5.7 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 6.2 | $2.29 |
| **Choceur** Milk Chocolate (Aldi) | 5.3 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 6.2 | $1.25 |
| **Lindt** Creamy Milk Chocolate | 5.2 | 8 | 3.5 | 4 | 6.1 | $2.99 |
| **Haigh's** Milk Chocolate | 4 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 4.7 | $9.50 |
| **Moser Roth** Milk Chocolate | 3.7 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 6.6 | $2.15 |
| **Cadbury** Dairy Milk | 3.7 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5.1 | $2.18 |
| **Whittaker's** Creamy Milk Chocolate | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 5.9 | $2.15 |
| **Woolworths Select** Milk Chocolate | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 3.4 | $1.35 |

## CHOC FULL OF CLAIMS

With manufacturers proudly advertising the percentage of cocoa their chocolates contain, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the higher the percentage of cocoa, the better it is. But this isn't necessarily the case.

The cocoa content (or cocoa solids) claim on a block of chocolate simply refers to everything in the block of chocolate that is derived from the cacao bean. This includes cocoa mass/liquor (ground-up cacao nibs, which contain 45-55% cocoa butter) as well as any extra cocoa butter added to the chocolate. Overall cocoa content will tell you more about how intense the chocolate flavour is rather than quality.

Cocoa percentage claims don't tell you anything about the quality and type of the cacao bean or the way it's been fermented and dried. Nor does it distinguish the amount of cocoa butter. According to one of our experts, Jodie Van Der Velden, cocoa butter content is a better indication of quality than the overall percentage of cocoa. She says cocoa butter is what makes the chocolate melt in your mouth and gives it that luxurious feel.

In other industries such as cosmetics, cocoa butter is a valuable commodity. Many lower-grade chocolates such as compound or cooking chocolate have the cocoa butter extracted and replaced with vegetable oil (usually palm oil) so it can be sold off.

Unfortunately for consumers, there is no requirement to label cocoa butter percentages on chocolate. The best indication as to cocoa butter content is how far up the ingredients list it is placed. The highest grade of chocolate, couverture chocolate, has a minimum cocoa butter content of 32%, with some as high as 41%.

# Dark chocolate

Expert Jodie Van Der Velden points out that, by definition, dark chocolate isn't supposed to contain milk. But we found more than half of the products on test do in fact contain milk products.

## EXPERTS' CHOICE

6.4 CHOICE panel

6.3 Experts

**Lindt Excellence Dark Chocolate (70% cocoa)**
Price per 100g: $3.89

This was the highest-ranking chocolate for the experts, and for the CHOICE panel it came in equal third. But only eight per cent chose it as their favourite. The experts said it had good depth of cocoa flavour with a good snap, indicating a high cocoa butter content.

*"An interesting dark chocolate with some fruity acidity, but leaves a slightly sticky mouthfeel."* – Jodie

Cacao beans from South and Central America are typically the best quality. generally, criollo and trinitario beans are better than forestero, says Jodie

The lay panel's response to this chocolate was mixed. Some enjoyed its strong cocoa flavour, while others found it too bitter, with a chemical flavour.
*"Very bitter – for the hardcore chocolate fans only!"* – CHOICE panellist

**OUR VERDICT** Good if you like a strong dark chocolate.

## THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

6.9 CHOICE panel

5 Experts

**Moser Roth Dark Chocolate (Aldi) (70% cocoa)**
Price per 100g: $2.15

This earned the highest average score from the CHOICE panel, with 14% saying it was their favourite. It ranked equal third with the experts, but their reviews were mixed.
*"Very little flavour development – lacks aroma and depth."* – Jodie
*"Thin, good snap. Smooth, good aftertaste. A good bite. One of the best."* – Tina

CHOICE panellists' responses were mixed, with some saying it was well balanced and pleasant while others called it ordinary and bland, and lacking in chocolate flavour.

**OUR VERDICT**
If you're a die-hard fan of intense chocolate this probably won't satisfy. But for $2.15 per 100 grams, it's good value.

## THE LOSERS

3.3 CHOICE panel

2.7 Experts

**Cadbury Old Gold 70% Cocoa Dark Chocolate**
Price per 100g: $2.18

Experts and CHOICE tasters agreed this was the worst dark chocolate, with 52% of CHOICE panellists saying it was their least favourite.
*"Like plasticine, but with a bit less flavour."* – CHOICE panellist

**OUR VERDICT** Don't waste your money.

4.2 CHOICE panel

3 Experts

**Cadbury Old Gold Original Dark Chocolate (45% cocoa)**
Price per 100g: $2.34

Not as bad as its higher-cocoa-content counterpart, but still not great. Experts described it as grainy, sweet and lacking in flavour.
*"Not good due to very bad immediate chemical flavour."* – Tina

**OUR VERDICT** Don't waste your money.

## THE REST

Aldi's **Choceur Dark Chocolate** was pretty average according to the experts, but didn't do too badly among the CHOICE panel.

Aldi's **Just Organic Dark Chocolate** with 70% cocoa is worth a look, particularly if you like a strong, traditional and bitter-tasting dark chocolate.

**Green & Black's Dark Chocolate** divided the crowd. Just over six per cent said it was their favourite, while 16% said it was their least favourite. But one expert rated it highly.

**Woolworths Gold Intense Dark Chocolate** also didn't scrub up too badly, coming in second with the CHOICE panel, 11% of whom said it was their favourite. It also came in equal-second with the experts.

## Read the label

**While the label on a chocolate block won't tell you everything, you can gather some wisdom from it. No single piece of information, such as the region or the cocoa content, determines quality. But a good chocolate should have very few ingredients.**

- **Cocoa mass**
- **Cocoa butter**
- **Sugar**
- **Milk in a milk chocolate. Dark chocolate, by definition, shouldn't have any (but some do – see far left)**
- **Vanilla (keep an eye out for vanillin, which is artificial)**
- **Emulsifier such as soya lecithin (should be less than 0.5%). It's simply holding the chocolate together.**

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

| DARK CHOCOLATE | Experts' average score | Jodie's score | Tina's score | Rebecca's score | CHOICE panel's score | Price per 100g* | Cocoa % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Lindt** Excellence 70% Cocoa Dark Chocolate | 6.3 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 6.4 | $3.89 | 70% |
| **Coles** Dark Chocolate | 5.3 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | $1.35 | 46% |
| **Green & Black's** Dark Chocolate | 5.3 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 5.2 | $4.00 | 70% |
| **Haigh's** Dark Chocolate | 5.3 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 6 | $9.50 | 51% |
| **Just Organic** Dark Chocolate (Aldi) | 5.3 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 6.4 | $2.29 | 70% |
| **Woolworths** Gold Intense Dark Chocolate | 5.3 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6.5 | $2.99 | 78% |
| **Choceur** Dark Chocolate (Aldi) | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6.4 | $1.25 | 45% |
| **Moser Roth** Dark Chocolate | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 6.9 | $2.15 | 70% |
| **Nestle** Club Dark Chocolate | 3.7 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5.6 | $2.39 | 45% |
| **Cadbury** Old Gold Original Dark Chocolate | 3 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 4.2 | $2.18 | 45% |
| **Whittaker's** 72% Cocoa Dark Ghana | 3 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 5.2 | $2.15 | 72% |
| **Woolworths Select** Dark Chocolate | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 4.6 | $1.35 | 47% |
| **Cadbury** Old Gold 70% Cocoa | 2.7 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3.3 | $2.18 | 70% |

# Facing up to Botox

The face of anti-wrinkle treatment is changing, as **Zoya Sheftalovich** explains

Botox, cosmetic fillers and other injectables are increasingly popular for treating wrinkles and expression lines, with some people even having so-called "preventative" injections. But if you're thinking about one or more of these treatments, what do you need to know before you even set foot in a cosmetic surgeon or doctor's office? CHOICE outlines the applications, benefits and risks.

## FILLING IN

Rather than just smoothing or tightening skin, an injectable filler aims to change the facial profile to a more youthful one. The injection of filler materials under the skin can fill in deep folds, such as nasolabial folds (also called "bracket lines", running from the corner of the nose to the corner of the mouth), create fuller lips and pad out hollow cheeks and eyes. While collagen used to be the standard filler, hyaluronic acid with brand names like Restylane is now more popular.

### How long do fillers last?

Hyaluronic acid fillers last six to 12 months; synthetic fillers such as Radiesse 12 to 18 months. Fat transfers (where your own body fat is extracted from another body part, processed and injected into your face) can sometimes last several years, though there's a chance the fat won't stay long and will be reabsorbed back into the body.

### How much do they cost?

The cost of a single unit of non-fat filler is about $500-600. To treat the lines around the mouth, for example, you'd require one ampoule of filler, and with treatment fees the cost would total approximately $600-800. Fat fillers could set you back thousands.

### Do they hurt?

The injections hurt, and the pain will vary depending on the patient and the area being injected. In places like the nasolabial area there may be a slight short-term burning. Anaesthetic is generally used for the lips, as the injections cause a burning and stinging that is intolerable for most.

### What are the risks?

The most common side effects of fillers are bruising, infection and allergic reaction. There can be significant complications if the operator accidentally injects filler into blood vessels, the most common being potential skin loss. Beware of permanent fillers, which are prone to significant and long-term side effects.

### CONSIDERING INJECTABLES?

- **Choose a practitioner who is a qualified medical doctor – or supervised by one – to perform the procedure.**
- **Attend a consultation before committing to the injectables, and ask for a treatment plan to outline how much work you need and how often you'll need to return.**
- **Consider the ongoing cost of keeping up with the treatments.**
- **Make sure you leave several days after attending your first consultation and before getting injectables to give you time to think about your decision.**

# ANTI-WRINKLE INJECTIONS

The anti-ageing properties of the botulinum toxin (sold as Botox and Dysport) are likely behind many a well-preserved face in Hollywood, and can be found closer to home, too. When injected, Botox relaxes muscles, preventing skin from creasing and causing wrinkles. It's effective for "expression lines", such as frown and surprise lines on the forehead and crow's feet around the eyes, and "turkey neck" – lines on the throat.

### Where can you get Botox?

Botox is a prescription-only drug, although people who aren't medical professionals may inject it. But beware of going down the bargain-basement path – botulinum is a potent bacterial neurotoxin, and there are consequences if it's not used correctly.

"Botox should be prescribed and used by doctors in appropriate settings," says Geoff Lyons, president of the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons. "If it's being injected by someone else, it should be done under appropriate supervision with a doctor on the premises. There are a number of people undertaking injection treatments apparently without supervision – we don't encourage that at all.

"Non-invasive procedures like fillers and Botox are considered low risk, but that doesn't mean no risk. Most risks are minor, but they're there."

### How much does it cost?

This depends on how much is injected. The number of units you'll need will depend on how active your muscles are. The price for a single unit is about $9-15. To treat the forehead you'll need roughly 10 to 20 units, costing between $90 and $300, depending on how much your practitioner charges. The cost is about the same for treating crow's feet.

### Does it hurt?

The pain has been described as similar to that of an ant bite, lasting for a few seconds.

### How long does it last?

The effects of Botox facial injections typically last three to four months, but they can last longer with ongoing treatment.

### What could go wrong?

Possible side effects of Botox are usually temporary and restricted to the area of injection. They include drooping of the eyelids, bruising, headache, face pain, redness, swelling at the injection site, bruising, skin tightness, muscle weakness, numbness or a feeling of pins and needles and nausea.

In rare cases, the toxin's effects can also spread away from the injection site, causing more serious side effects including issues with swallowing, speaking, or breathing due to weakening of associated muscles which can be severe in cases where larger doses of Botox are administered, such as when treating spasticity (see below).

## Is prevention better than cure?

With the smoothing properties of Botox being touted far and wide, there have been some reports of disturbingly young people – including those in their teens – having so-called "preventative" Botox. The message is that if you start young, you can stop wrinkles from ever appearing in the first place. Dr Lyons (see above) says he's even heard of teenagers being offered injectables as a reward for performing well in their school exams. However, he cautions against using Botox and fillers too soon.

"It's a relatively expensive procedure to have done before any major signs of visible ageing," says Lyons. "The question is when you jump on the conveyer belt of treatment. I'm not sure there's any long-term data to support early intervention, and certainly not in the under-18s group."

## NOT JUST SAVING FACE

Botox is in fact a commonly prescribed drug for a host of non-cosmetic medical conditions. It can help those with MS and cerebral palsy, as well as people suffering from teeth grinding, incontinence and more.

Botox can treat **excessive sweating** (hyperhidrosis) by paralysing the sweat glands. It can be used on the armpits, face, hands and feet, and in some cases will be covered by Medicare. In the underarm area, one Botox treatment can relieve excessive sweating for over six months and in some cases for more than a year. It wears off after about three to four months in the feet and about six months in the hands. The downside is that injections in the hands and feet can be painful.

Botox can also help those with **bladder weakness**. It's injected into the bladder muscle, causing it to relax, increasing storage capacity and reducing incontinence. The procedure lasts between six and 12 months.

To treat chronic **migraines** (those that occur more than 14 days in a month), Botox is multiply injected every 12 weeks around the head and neck. It works to dull future headache symptoms. ■

# Give the gift of CHOICE this Mother's Day

Mother's Day is on Sunday 11 May 2014

**CHOICE is bursting with information and tips designed to save you time and money. So why not give your mum a CHOICE membership this Mother's Day?**

**Go to choice.com.au/gifts**

**PS** Looking to buy mum some chocolates for Mother's Day? Turn to page 20 to see the results of our taste test!

**27%**

The percentage of people who believe gluten-free foods aid weight loss

**65%**

believe these foods are healthier than foods containing gluten*

# The gluten revolution

Supermarket aisles are bulging with gluten-free products, but are they really any better for you or worth the extra expense? **Miranda Herron** finds out

A gluten-free diet is absolutely non-negotiable for people with coeliac disease. For them, the boom in gluten-free products has been a great leap forward from the bad old days when gluten-free products were prohibitively expensive and hard to find.

But there is evidence of a growing trend for people who have not been diagnosed with coeliac disease choosing gluten free for lifestyle for health reasons, including to "feel better" and for weight loss. Are these people misguided? The answer, most likely, is yes. A gluten-free diet is restrictive, complex and time-consuming, and there is no scientific evidence that it benefits people who don't have coeliac disease. Coeliac Australia estimates that while just 60,000 (0.3%) of Australians have been diagnosed with coeliac disease, at least 10% of the local population are strictly controlling gluten consumption, and a further 18% are loosely controlling their gluten intake.

As a report from global market research company Mintel neatly sums up: "Perceptions of gluten-free foods have moved from being bland, boring substitutes for gluten-containing products to everyday items that appeal to those with and without a gluten allergy."

## Free of nutritional value

"The gluten-free diet is a medical diet for a medical condition," says accredited nutritionist and dietitian Catherine Saxelby. "The gluten-free substitutes for bread, pasta, cereals and flour contain grains such as tapioca and potato starch or rice flour, which have very few nutrients and are low in fibre, vitamin B1, phosphorous, magnesium, thiamin and protein."

Gluten-free foods are more likely to be filled with additives such as gums and stabilisers to help recreate the texture of wheat products, and gluten-free cereals are less likely to be fortified with iron or B vitamins. Unlike regular bread, gluten-free breads aren't required to add folate, which is important for women who are pregnant or trying to conceive to prevent foetal neural tube defects. (However, if a gluten-free bread contains salt it must be iodised, just like regular bread.)

**While just 0.3% of Australians have been diagnosed with coeliac disease, 28% of the population is following a gluten-free diet**

*SOURCE: HTTP://WWW.MINTEL.COM/PRESS-CENTRE/FOOD-AND-DRINK/GLUTEN-FREE-FOOD-TO-LOSE-WEIGHT. IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

"If your gluten-free diet is balanced across many food groups and swaps out gluten-containing foods and swaps in lots of fruit, veggies, eggs, nuts, dairy, gluten-free wholegrains, legumes and lean meat, then that's ideal," says Saxelby. "But if it's full of low-fibre, high-fat, sugary and highly processed starches, your gluten-free diet won't be healthy.

"Processed gluten-free foods are attractive to coeliacs who don't want to miss out on their treats. But these foods often aren't a health-conscious choice, and shouldn't make up a large part of anyone's diet."

## The 'health halo' effect

Just like health claims such as "low fat" and "organic", "gluten free" can be used on foods to create what's known in marketing psychology as a "health halo", where health claims on packaging encourage people to perceive a product as being healthier or better than other similar products.

Research has found gluten-free products appeal to consumers who often perceive gluten free as being in the same space as "natural" or "healthier" foods, and manufacturers are creating products that pander to this perception. San Remo, for example, has released a new "Slimmers Selection" range of pastas made from an Asian vegetable called konjac. It is not only gluten free but also fat free, dairy free, low carb, low kilojoule and has zero protein. It might be the perfect diet product, but when it comes to health, says Saxelby, it has almost no nutrients.

We also found the health halo effect alive and kicking in the potato chip section of the supermarket. Plain potato chips are generally gluten free – it's the flavourings that can contain gluten. Macro Gluten Free Potato Chips (above), which also claim to be wheat free and with no added MSG, artificial colours, flavours or preservatives, will set you back $2.54 per 100g. By comparison, a similar-size packed of Smiths Original Potato Chips are $1.82 per 100g and are also gluten- and wheat-free, with no added MSG, artificial colours or flavours.

## TAKE A (PRICE) HIKE

Gluten-free products often require extra ingredients to create a palatable texture or flavour, and those ingredients such as rice flour or almond meal may be more expensive than wheat flour. Different processing methods and facilities, lack of economies of scale, additional supply chain and distribution costs can also push up the costs.

Sometimes, however, you'll find almost identical products are more expensive simply because they're grouped with other gluten-free products. We found Fantastic Gluten Free Rice Crackers (below) in the gluten-free section of the supermarket to be more expensive than the Fantastic Original Rice Crackers, which, while also gluten free, were located with the regular crackers.

## Naturally misleading

The gluten revolution has even led to labelling of products that are naturally gluten free as "gluten free". This seems to be a case of opportunistic marketing, designed to appeal to gluten-conscious consumers wanting to make a quick and easy decision, or those who simply don't understand what gluten free really means and where gluten is likely to be found.

As an example, there is no gluten in rice. Yet SunRice's Low GI microwavable white rice (right) has a prominent "gluten free" tag. It's double the price of Woolworths Select rice, which, apart from having a higher glycaemic index (GI), has almost identical ingredients.

We also discovered The Good Meal Gluten Free Butter Chicken & Rice (right) in the freezer section. But a quick survey of cook-in butter chicken sauces and other similar ready meals found all these are gluten free anyway. The meal isn't any more expensive than other similar products, but again its gluten-free claim is a canny – and somewhat deceptive – marketing strategy.

## IS GLUTEN INTOLERANCE A MYTH?

The immune system in people with coeliac disease (pronounced "seel-ee-ak") reacts abnormally to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oats, causing small bowel damage. Some people experience severe symptoms, while others have no obvious symptoms. But everybody with coeliac disease, irrespective of the severity of their symptoms, must strictly adhere to a gluten-free diet.

"Non-coeliac gluten sensitivity" describes a set of symptoms people attribute to dietary gluten. The cause and treatment of the symptoms isn't well understood, but research published in 2013 found there may be no such thing as "gluten sensitivity" or "gluten intolerance". While coeliac disease can be medically diagnosed, there is no test for gluten sensitivity accepted by mainstream medicine.

It's suspected that those who don't have coeliac disease, but report feeling better when gluten is removed from the diet, may actually have a problem with FODMAPs – the carbohydrate component in wheat – rather than the gluten protein.

## Junk is still junk

**$5.88 per 100g**

**$1.11 per 100g**

Some people see the gluten-free diet as a way to help with weight loss. But losing kilos on a gluten-free diet won't be due to cutting out the gluten protein – it's likely to be a result of cutting out extra kilojoules by avoiding foods such as breads, biscuits and cakes.

People who substitute gluten-free versions of processed foods may in fact put on weight because they can be be higher in kilojoules, fat and sugar than the original version. With bakery items such as snack bars and bread, gluten adds elasticity and body. And extra fat is sometimes used in gluten-free foods to add moisture and texture, and extra sugar added for taste.

Macro Double Choc Muffins (above) are not only more than five times as expensive as regular muffins, they're also 150kJ higher per 100g and higher in saturated fat. Sugar is the main ingredient in these gluten-free muffins, as opposed to wheat flour for the Woolworths Select muffins.

## Seven times healthier?

Macro Wholefoods Gluten Free Plain Flour (right) is seven times more expensive than Homebrand Plain Flour, but has 62% less protein and 34% less fibre. Both products contain highly processed grains, but the gluten-free flour uses tapioca and maize starches, which tend to have a higher GI and don't offer any health benefit over the regular flour.

**$5.32 per 100g**

**75c per 100g**

## CHOICE verdict

Global trends suggest there is no sign of slowdown in the sale of gluten-free foods, and the Australian market is reportedly forecast to hit $98.6m by 2015. The good news is that gluten-free foods are likely to become healthier as analysts predict products high in sugar, salt and fat will no longer appeal to consumers who turn to gluten free for health and diet reasons.

As with any other type of food, always read the ingredients list and nutrition panel carefully if choosing gluten free. Take the time to compare prices, and steer clear of sugary, high-fat products. Check the fibre, fat, salt and sugar levels of gluten-free foods against regular products, and look for healthier gluten-free foods with wholegrains such as brown rice (with its higher levels of fibre and B-group vitamins) or buckwheat, amaranth, quinoa and millet. ■

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

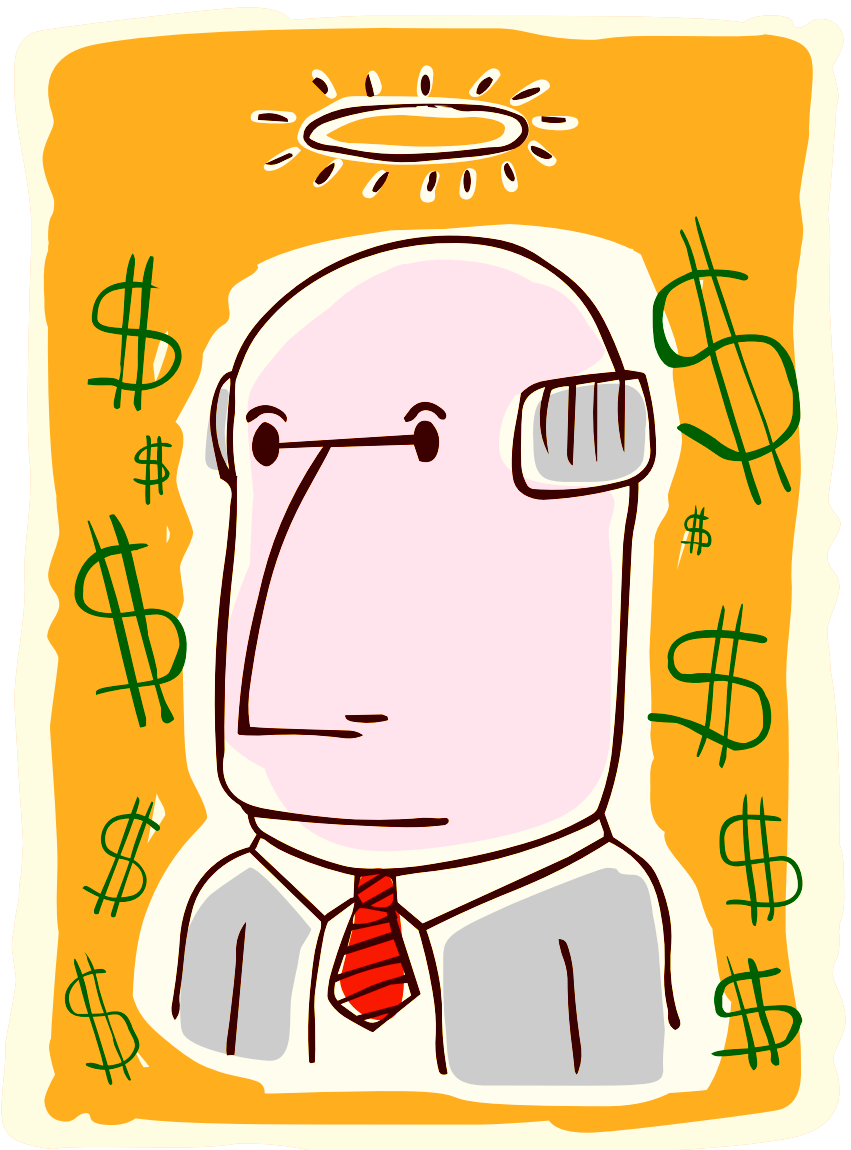
# Returns on influence

When corporate sponsors wield their wallets as weapons, consumers can score a raw deal, as **Karina Bray** discovers

When the government health-star rating system for foods was pulled on the day it was supposed to launch, it pointed to possible unnecessary political interference. And indeed, it later turned out that the chief of staff had links with the food industry.

Corporate and political history is rife with examples of insider influence on power holders. But not all companies are blessed with these connections, and some seek other ways of getting into bed, so to speak, with the powerful and influential.

An increasingly common – and controversial way – is through corporate



## Sponsors will expect payback for their money

sponsorship. Some companies fund social and environmental not-for-profit groups because they believe in it, are philanthropic for the sake of it, or want to be (or be seen as) good corporate citizens. However, sponsors will expect some payback for their investment, and they can benefit in more than one way.

Here, we look specifically at not-for-profit organisations and professional bodies in the health arena, and how sponsors operate in this area.

### Healthy halo

Sponsorship can improve a company's image by creating a positive association between its brand and the organisation it's supporting. So when McDonald's provides funding for Ronald McDonald House Charities, which help sick children, this can create a "halo effect" where McDonald's goodness in supporting sick children extends more generally to the company as a whole.

But McDonald's sponsorship of Little Athletics and other sporting groups is more contentious. Every week, thousands of kids run around in their Little Athletics uniforms with the McDonald's logo on display, earning McDonald's vouchers as rewards. On its website McDonald's boasts of sponsoring various kids' programs, saying: "Today we like to focus on activities that improve the health and wellbeing of Australian children".

Critics argue McDonald's is ducking responsibility of its role, as a provider of foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, in the current obesity epidemic by shifting the onus from healthy diet to physical activity – then providing funds and publicity for such physical activity. Dr Jane

## Industry-sponsored medical research

Funding bias is a particular kind of influence found in scientific research, where results tend to support the interests of the sponsor. This issue recently came to the fore when high-profile consumer health advocate Dr Ken Harvey resigned from La Trobe University over its sponsorship deal with Swisse, which has a track record of misusing research results, and has been reprimanded accordingly by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Dr Harvey was concerned about similar tactics being used in its partnership with La Trobe.

Dr Harvey points out there are numerous ways that sponsors can get the results they want from research, including:

- designing research in such a way that the product tested will look good (testing against placebo instead of current best practice, for example, or conducting so many tests that at least one will come out favourably simply by chance)
- distorting results to exaggerate positives and minimise negatives
- manipulating data, and
- cherry-picking the best results (and putting negative findings in "the bottom drawer").

Martin, of the Obesity Policy Coalition, points out the chain is targeting a vulnerable population. Research has shown that marketing to kids through sport influences the types of food they prefer, demand and consume. Ultimately, this undermines healthy eating messages and is likely to contribute to poor diets, negative health outcomes, weight gain and obesity.

A spokesperson from McDonald's told CHOICE: "The main purpose of our support is to add value to the community and encourage kids to be active and embrace balanced lifestyles."

### Health washing

Halo effect sounds pleasant. "Health washing", on the other hand, sounds less pleasant. This is when a company marketing unhealthy products tries not only to look good (halo effect) but also simultaneously seeks to distract from its unhealthy image by supporting healthy causes.

Like McDonald's, Coca-Cola spruiks the value of physical exercise in leading a healthy lifestyle, diverting attention from the role of unhealthy food and drink choices in obesity and chronic disease. Coke has been accused of health washing in its sponsorship of Exercise is Medicine, an international program devised and run by exercise physiologists, which uses specially designed exercise programs to treat chronic health conditions (such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis and osteoporosis) and obesity, as well as certain forms of cancer. The local website carries the Coca-Cola logo, with the accompanying text: "Coca-Cola South Pacific supports local initiatives which help people lead more active and healthy lifestyles".

Critics argue this is disingenuous, given sugary soft drinks have been named and shamed as one of the main contributors to the modern-day obesity epidemic, along with cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer – the very conditions Exercise is Medicine addresses. Shifting attention to physical activity suggests it's OK to drink sugary drinks as long as you exercise it off.

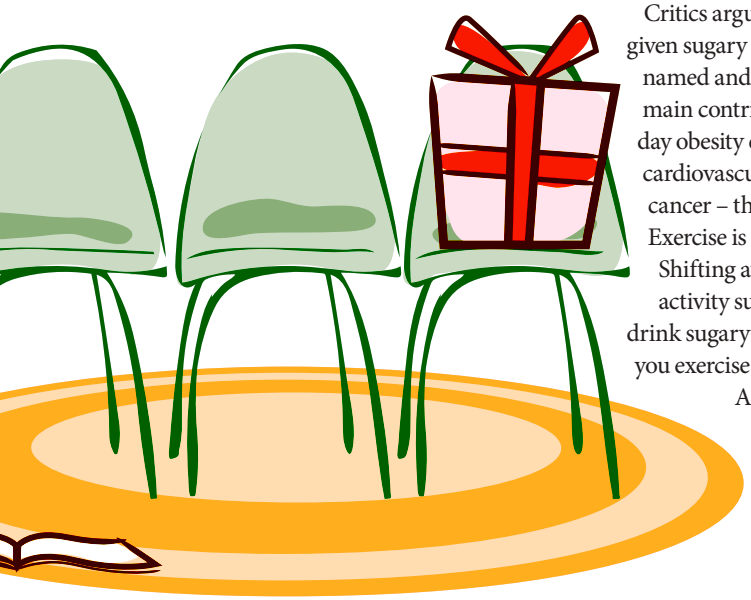
A similar accusation is levelled at Coke for its sponsorship of the Happiness Cycle program with Bicycle Network, which in turn was heavily criticised for accepting the money. Bicycle Network argues the sponsorship allowed it to implement a program that could benefit thousands of teenagers by getting them outdoors riding on free bikes, and believes that, in this case, the end justifies the means. We invited Coke to comment but they hadn't by the time we went to press.

### Publicity overdrive

When every kid at Little Athletics runs around with a McDonald's logo on their shirt, that's advertising. When cricketers wear beer logos on their shirts, that's advertising. And, they're advertising to kids, effectively getting around preventative rules about marketing to children on TV, in print and elsewhere.

Drug companies do the same thing with their freebie handouts to doctors – pens, notepads and so on. As well as keeping the brand name top of mind, psychological studies have shown that receiving even small gifts drives recipients to reciprocate, in this case perhaps by prescribing a particular drug over another equally appropriate one. Medicines Australia is cracking down on small gifts for this reason.

However, pharma-sponsored dinners and overseas conferences reflect another form of unhealthy influence. At present there are moves to make these transactions more transparent, although



IMAGES: THINKSTOCK

the proposed system of disclosure will be self-regulated by the industry and allow doctors to opt out.

How do sponsors influence what an organisation does or says – or what they don't say? Last year, the Food and Grocery Council announced a proposal to raise the limit of allowable levels of gluten in foods labelled "gluten free" (see page 27) from the current level, which is no detectable traces, to amounts of up to 20 parts per million (ppm), as in other countries. Coeliac Australia, on the advice of its medical advisory committee, supports the proposed increase.

If "gluten-free" in Australia were to mean the same as in other countries, this would be convenient for food manufacturers and importers. It would also allow manufacturers a little more leeway and margin for error, so they can produce food more cheaply. According to Coeliac Australia, while less than one per cent of the population has coeliac disease, 28% of Australians choose gluten-free products as a lifestyle choice rather than a safety issue – they'll benefit from having a wider, cheaper range of goods with low levels of gluten. Research by Coles, a major sponsor of Coeliac Australia, reported that more than 40% of shoppers were buying gluten-free foods.

Nevertheless, some gluten-free food producers, such as Freedom Foods, are opposed to the increase and would prefer to keep the current standard. They argue the Australian standard is a world leader, and point out that for some coeliacs the 20ppm level would not be safe. This position is confirmed by gastroenterologist professor Geoffrey Forbes, who says increasing the amount of dietary gluten will lead to adverse health outcomes in an undetermined proportion of patients with coeliac disease.

So why would Coeliac Australia support a move that appears contrary to the interests of coeliacs?

We're concerned that its sponsors, which include companies that make gluten-free products, present a potential conflict of interest.

Although Freedom Foods, a Coeliac Australia sponsor, has spoken out against the increase, many other sponsors support it. We contacted CA for comment, but had not heard back from them before going to print.

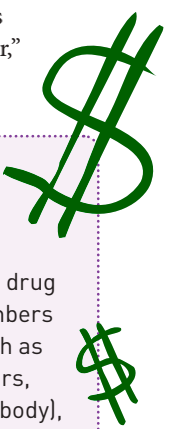
One of the Australian Institute of Sport's major sponsors is Gatorade, which produces sports drinks and electrolyte replacements. As part of expert advice on rehydration, sports drinks are recommended instead of water for exercise bouts lasting more than an hour, partly for rehydration but also as fuel from the carbohydrate. A few examples of sports drinks are given, including Gatorade – whose logo appears prominently on all pages related to hydration – but no one brand is said to be better than another. Sports drinks, the AIS assures us, "are not gimmicks. They are legitimate products that are well researched and proven to improve fluid intake and performance".

Oft-cited hydration guidelines also suggest drinking before you're thirsty to avoid dehydration, and the palatability and saltiness of sports drinks encourages this. However, independent medical experts recommend athletes drink when they're thirsty. Most of the "research" behind these guidelines is sponsored by – you guessed it – sports drink companies, as are the people making the guidelines themselves.

There's also potential for sponsors to influence what's *not* said. When the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) formed partnerships with Nestle, Kellogg, Unilever and other food manufacturers in 2005, there was concern that, as some of these companies make products that aren't very nutritious, this would appear to be at odds with what dietitians advise people to eat. Certainly in the early days of sponsorship, some DAA members were dismayed. While no-one expected the DAA to suddenly extol the virtues of Coco Pops, it's what they might not say that caused concern. In particular, concerns were raised that it would affect the DAA's ability to criticise the marketing of junk food to children and to take a strong stand on consumer-friendly food labelling (traffic lights, stars and so on).

## It's what the DAA might *not* say about unhealthy foods that's cause for concern

The DAA told us that partnerships involve legal contracts that protect the independence of both organisations. "The DAA can and does express its opinion without fear or favour," says CEO Claire Hewat. ■



## What can be done?

- The Obesity Policy Coalition wants to see government take action on sponsorship of kids' sports by companies that spruik unhealthy foods and drinks, such as by providing alternative funding to children's sporting organisations and monetary incentives for clubs to seek other sponsors.
- While there are steps being taken to address pharmaceutical company sponsorships, CHOICE has called for reporting to be extended to drug companies that aren't members of Medicines Australia (such as generic medicines producers, which have their own peak body), and to all registered health professionals, not just doctors. And the reporting system shouldn't allow opting out.

# Opening credits

## Full credit to Beryl & Donald

People with these names have on average the best credit score compared with other names on the Veda database

A new credit-reporting regime means closer scrutiny of – and harsher penalties for – consumers, as **Uta Mihm** explains

Even if your finances are squeaky clean and you've developed a healthy habit of paying off your credit cards on time and in full, at some point you've probably forgotten to make a minimum payment at least once. Or maybe you were late on a payment for that mega TV you bought through an irresistible "buy now, pay later" offer.

Up until now, paying a week or so late wouldn't have made you a credit risk. But things have changed. Following a new credit-reporting and privacy regime that came into play on 12 March, missing a payment by more than five days now means a black mark on your credit report. Before the change, only a string of missed payments that amounted to a default would go on your record.

What's the worry? A minor blemish could have big consequences. In particular, a black mark could damage your credit rating and mean you'll be charged a higher interest rate next time you apply for credit.

And under the new regime, it isn't hard for the money minders to keep tabs. The new repayment history information, which covers credit cards, car, home and personal loans, store finance offers and other types of credit, is held by credit-reporting agencies such as Veda and Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). Any evidence of tardy payments can easily be accessed by your bank or other financial institutions when assessing your creditworthiness. So if you've notched up a few black marks due to late payments, you may have to pay more to borrow money.

If this comes as a shock, you're not alone. According to the Australian Retail Credit Association, 59% of Australians don't understand how credit reporting works, let alone know about these major changes.

### HOW CAN I GET A MISTAKE FIXED?

- If there's an incorrect listing on your credit report, such as a default on a phone payment for an address you did not live at, contact the company that's made the mistake.
- If the problem isn't resolved, contact the relevant dispute resolution scheme, for example the TIO. See **choice.com.au/fixyourcreditreport** for contact details of the most important ones.
- If you're not satisfied with the outcome, contact the Australian Information Commissioner – oaic.gov.au or 1300 363 992.

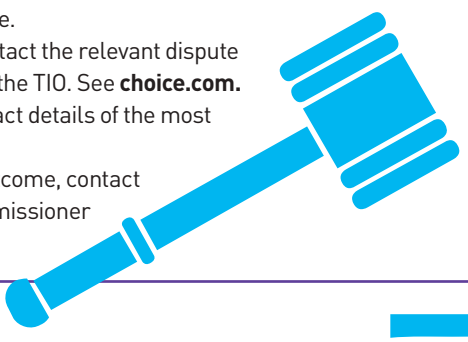
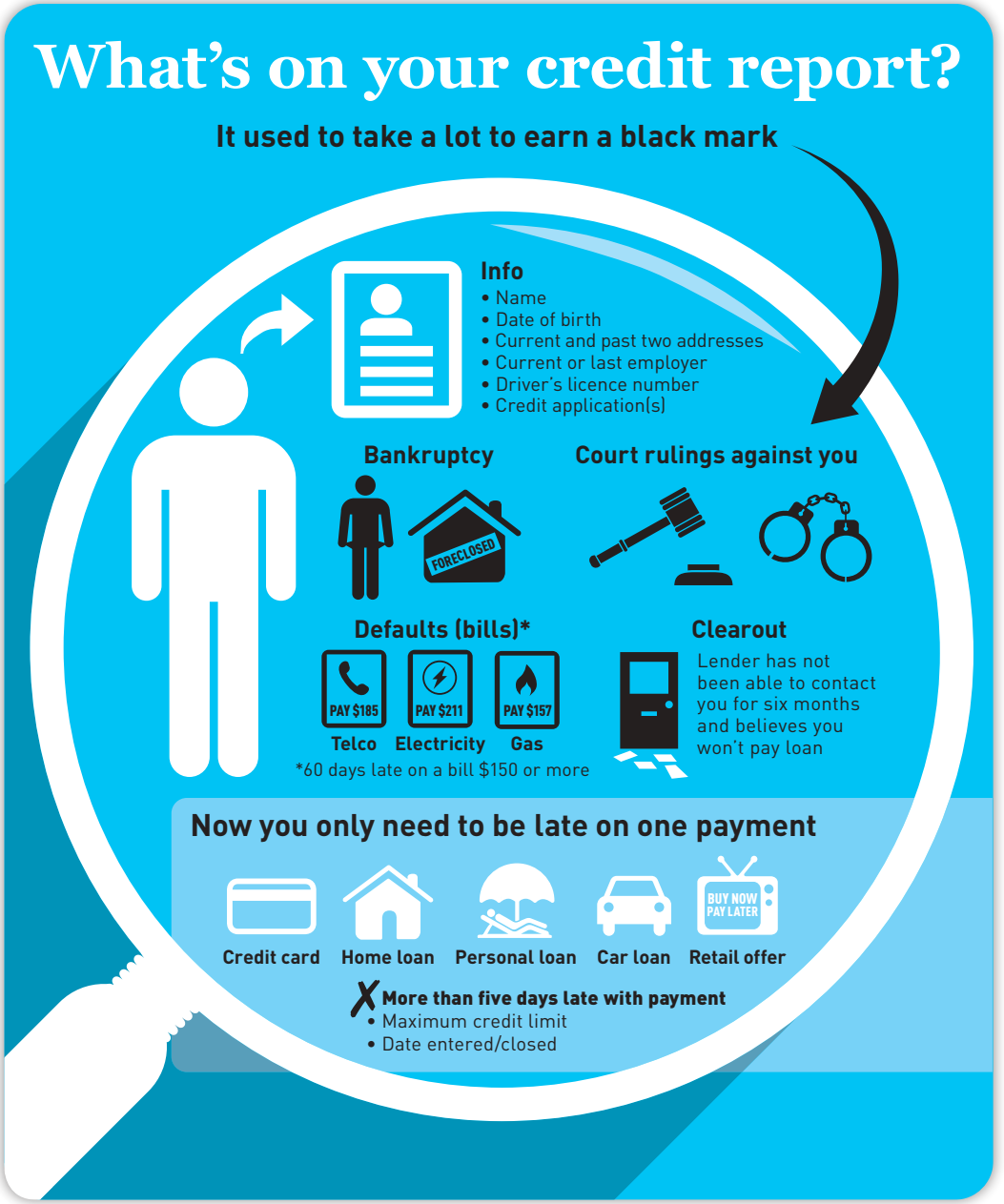


IMAGE: THINKSTOCK




## What's changed?

Before 12 March this year, only major infractions were noted on your credit report, such as paying your phone bill more than 60 days late. This is defined as a default and will still go on your file, but now the unpaid bill will have to be at least $150 to count as a default, up from $100.

This is one of only a few minor wins for consumers, since the new regime also keeps track of a range of other information that was previously unrecorded, including the date a credit card or personal loan was opened and closed, the maximum credit limit and whether you made the minimum payment on time. The same applies to mortgages, investment home loans, car loans and in-store finance. Whether or not you paid on time is noted each month and the information retained for two years – see infographic, right.

Lenders say the additional information will help them do a better job with loan applications. "It means we can make more informed decisions on customers' credit applications, make the right decision for the customer, and ensure we lend responsibly," an ANZ spokesperson told CHOICE.

And credit-reporting agencies argue that consumers could benefit from more information on their credit report. Say, for example, you hit a hard patch a few years ago and had an electricity bill default, but you've now paid the overdue bill and have always made your payments on time ever since. This could mean your credit rating has improved and your bank will look at you as a better credit risk than under the old system where they had less information. However, black marks on your credit report may mean your application for a credit card or home loan will get knocked back. But this probably won't happen if the only problem with your report is that you were six days late on a car loan payment. You could still, however, be penalised for making late payments.

"It's inevitably going to lead to those consumers being charged higher interest rates," says Katherine Lane, principal solicitor at the Consumer Credit Legal Centre.

If possible, arrange a direct debit for at least the minimum payment on all your credit cards and other loans so that you can avoid late payments.

## Oops!

A lot more information for credit-reporting agencies means a lot more opportunity for mistakes – and there were already plenty of them under the previous system. A 2013 survey by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) revealed 30% of Australians found mistakes in their credit report. And it can take time and effort to get mistakes corrected; only 60% of people surveyed who found mistakes got them sorted.

Credit is often an immediate need, and a bad credit rating due to a mistake on your report can mean a delay of a few

## How long?!

**2021**

**Seven years** is how long information about a bankruptcy stays on your credit report.

**2019**

**Five years** is how long information about a payment default for consumer credit such as a credit card or utility bill of more than 60 days stays on your credit report.

**2016**

**Two years** is how long information about a delay of more than five days in paying your credit card, home loan or personal loan stays on your credit report.

weeks or months. By then, your dream house may have been sold to someone else. That's why ordering your credit report regularly to make sure everything is up-to-date and accurate is a good idea.

Unfortunately, the system doesn't make this easy. Credit-reporting agencies are obliged to give you a free report every 12 months – or when you've been denied credit. But there are now three credit-reporting agencies in Australia, and an additional one if you live in Tasmania (see right). You'll need to order a report from each of them, which means you'll have to check through three or four reports to be sure the agencies have got it right.

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

## Pay up or the wedding gets it!

Consumer advocate David Leermakers was denied a personal loan to pay for his wedding because of an unpaid $350 phone bill listed on his credit report. "This was before I worked at the Consumer Action Law Centre, and at the time I knew virtually nothing about credit reporting," he says. It turned out the bill was from a time David had lived in a shared house and his name had stayed on the bill after he moved out. The other tenants failed to pay the bill. "As we needed the loan quickly, I just had to sort it out. I paid the debt and the loan was approved."

It also doesn't help that the credit-reporting agencies are private, profit-minded organisations. Two, Veda and D&B, also offer paid-for express reports and other options, such as a credit alert or credit score. Veda advertises these services prominently on the website, while the link to the free report is very hard to find.

Consequently, 43% of the respondents to the OIAC survey who had accessed their report had paid for it. According to David Leermakers, senior policy officer at the Consumer Action Law Centre, "it's often the people who can least afford it" who end up paying.

The credit-reporting agencies are on notice to do a better job. "One of the things we'll be doing after the commencement of [the new reporting regime] is an assessment on how those types of organisations are meeting their requirements," says Privacy Commissioner, Timothy Pilgrim.

CHOICE will also be watching. ■

### FREE CREDIT REPORT

You have the right to a free credit report every 12 months or if you've been denied credit such as a home loan. To get yours, contact all three of the credit-reporting agencies below.

- **Veda**
  mycreditfile.com.au,
  1300 762 207
- **Dun & Bradstreet**
  checkyourcredit.com.au,
  1300 734 806
- **Experian**
  experian.com.au,
  1300 783 684

And if you live in Tasmania, you'll also need to contact the **Tasmanian Collection Service** – tascol.com.au, (03) 6213 5555

For the links to all free report applications, go to **choice.com.au/freecreditreport**

**$2bn**

The extra amount expected to be paid in default account super fees before MySuper becomes the mandatory default option in 2017.

**$3780**

The difference between the highest and lowest average annual superannuation fee for a $200,000 account.

# Y care about super?

Super fees are all over the shop, and younger fund members in particular should check their deductions. **Andy Kollmorgen** crunches the numbers

Younger people usually don't get too fussed about their superannuation funds. But they'd probably pay more attention if, for instance, they knew their fund was charging as little as $300 or as much as $1245 in annual fees on a $50,000 account – all for "services" they didn't for ask for and may not need. And if your super account reaches $200,000, the gap widens considerably – from $1200 up to $4980 in annual fees.

These kinds of deductions can really chip away at your retirement savings. It's also important to know whether you're in a retail or an industry super fund – fees for the former are usually higher. To make matters worse, super fees are often hard to detect – and the financial services industry is fighting hard to keep it that way (in part by lobbying to get rid of the "opt in" clause in the Future of Financial Advice – or FoFA – reforms).

## The facts on fees

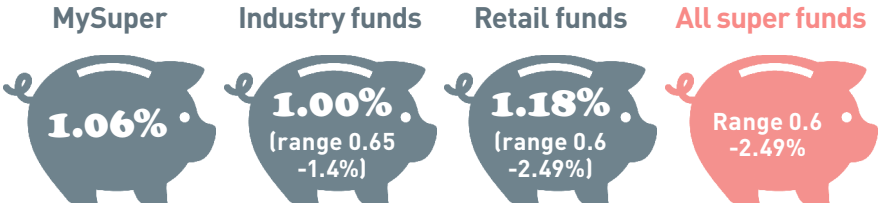
It's not surprising that most younger people don't know where their super money is going. About 70% of Australian employees leave it up to their employer to choose their super account.

The launch of the government's MySuper scheme at the start of this year means employers now have to make sure default super accounts (where your money ends up if you don't make a choice) are in a fund that offers a MySuper option. As of February, the introduction of the scheme had caused fees to drop by 26% across the industry.

But there is a catch – even though your super account has to be with a fund that offers a MySuper option, your money doesn't have to go into an actual MySuper account until 2017. That means nearly four more years of avoidably high fees for those who aren't paying attention.

The solution? If your money started off in a default account, tell your super fund to move your money to a MySuper account if they haven't done so already.

## Average super fees*




*Average fee (percentage of total balance). Source: Heron Partnership

# Comparing super fund fees

## Who's charging less?

As of December 2013, these 11 super funds that are open to everyone had the lowest fees based on a $50,000 balance, averaging about $350 per year. Unless your mandatory super contributions are going to a fund that charges similar fees or to a MySuper account, you're probably paying significantly more.

It's worth noting, though, that low-fee funds may offer less protection in the way of life, total and permanent disability (TPD) and income protection insurance.

And you also need to consider performance. Only one of these low-fee funds, AMIST Super, was a top 10 performer over the past five years for its balanced investment account (usually the default choice), averaging a 9.9% return per year.

So the trick is to find a fund with good returns and low fees, and to make sure you're not paying for something you don't need. Super comparison websites such as Canstar and SelectingSuper can be useful tools for comparing funds, but keep in mind that such sites use different rating methods. Use them as a research tool only, not a decision maker, and look for long-term solid performers.

** SOURCE: SUPERRATINGS. IMAGES: THINKSTOCK

**Annual fees based on $50K balance****

## PERFORMANCE CHECK

Superannuation account returns have been on the rise after taking a beating at the hands of the GFC. Median balanced funds (in most cases the default option) posted a healthy 16%+ return for 2013 – a big improvement over the previous three years, when most accounts earned about 8.6% a year.

But that doesn't mean your fund is in the winner's column, especially if the fund manager has a conflict of interest problem – and there are plenty reports of that going around. Recent revelations about super funds investing in the banks that own them instead of shopping around for the best return should serve as a cautionary message for people just starting to build their nest eggs.

Such mismanagement has reportedly meant returns as low as 1.38%, well below the inflation rate. Add in high fees, and your super account could really lose value in the long run.

## COMPARING SUPER FUNDS

- **Look for good performance over a five-year period** rather than exceptional performance for just a year or so. Superannuation is a long-term investment.
- **Be sure to factor in taxes and fees** when checking performance figures.

You should also only compare funds with similar investment strategies, or those with roughly the same mix of shares, fixed interest and cash. For Gen Y-ers, a fund focused on growth – with more exposure to the potentially higher gains of the share market – is generally a good call. But talk to a trusted financial adviser to find the right pick for your services, preferably one who has no commercial connection to any of the funds they recommend. And only agree to pay on a one-off, fee-for-service basis. ■

# Ask the Experts

## Got a niggling question our team can help with?

**Q I just purchased a Bosch WAP2460AU from the Good Guys, based on CHOICE's test results. I paid all the extra fees for delivery, installation and removal of the old machine, as well as an extended warranty. The machine requires two drum clean cycles before you put in the first wash, so I followed the instructions and did this. On the second drum clean, the machine leaked. The Good Guys claimed this was due to "too many suds". Do you have any advice?**

Matthew Steen

**A CHOICE whitegoods expert Matthew Steen replies:** Given you've just bought the machine, you'll want to head back to the Good Guys. Both suppliers and manufacturers guarantee that a product is of acceptable quality when it's sold to a consumer – and it's not acceptable for your washer, a major purchase, to be leaking after only one run. This could be considered a major failure, as no reasonable consumer would buy a machine that leaks. In this case, you're entitled to ask for your choice of a refund or replacement under the Australian Consumer Law.

You can find more guidance on the ACL in relation to whitegoods at accc.gov.au/publications/electrical-whitegoods-an-industry-guide-to-the-australian-consumer-law

**Q I just received a quote for home and contents insurance from AAMI, but they didn't provide a sum insured for my home. When I asked them about this, they told me that "if your house burns down, we will decide what the house was worth, based on the information you gave us". Is this standard practice?**

**A CHOICE insurance expert Jodi Bird replies:** AAMI is currently one of only two insurers (along with ANZ) to offer total replacement cover. This means that if your home is lost or damaged in an insured event, they'll pay whatever it costs to rebuild to the standard it was before the event. This type of cover is particularly useful in natural disasters.

Building costs rise as the demand for building services rise, as does the cost of temporary accommodation. Homes often also have to be rebuilt to new, higher standards after a flood or bushfire. This can mean the cost of rebuilding your home is a lot more than the sum insured, and a lot of people are left underinsured as a result. So to answer your question, it is unusual, but is actually a better level of insurance.

Jodi Bird

### Ask us!

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at **asktheexperts@choice.com.au** or write to us at:
Ask the Experts, CHOICE,
57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville,
NSW 2204

**Q I'm about to replace my oven, and I'm confused about the difference between fan-forced and fan-assist functions. What are these used for?**

Rebecca Ciaramidaro

**A CHOICE household content producer Rebecca Ciaramidaro replies:** The fan-forced function generates heat from an element at the back of the oven, which is circulated by a fan surrounded by the element. With fan-forced, the oven heats relatively quickly and efficiently, which is helpful for multi-shelf cooking, especially for roasts, cakes, casseroles and baked foods. It's similar to conventional bake but faster, with more even heat distribution. This function generally gets the most use. The fan-assist function uses the top and bottom elements, while a fan circulates the heat. This can be useful for multi-shelf cooking as it helps distribute the hot air evenly. This function is good for foods that require crisp bases, such as pastries and pizza.

Turn to page 47 for our latest review of ovens.

COMPILED BY SIOBAHN DONOHOE

# On Test

Ovens, vacuums, TVs and e-readers – they're all here


**40 Product reliability**
Our survey reveals the products that stand the test of time

**47 Ovens**
Which model stands out from the rest in our test kitchen?

**50 Kettles & toasters**
Your best breakfast options

**56 Vacuums**
Should you join the robot revolution or stick with convention?

**60 Washing machines**
In the battle of the brands, how does yours compare?

**64 E-readers**
A case of the fine print

**68 Hyundai ix35**
Our home testers take the Highlander AWD for a spin

**70 TVs**
The big winners from our latest test...

**72 Media hubs**
...and watch what you want by streaming content to your TV with a media hub


What's up doc? Find out what's cooking in the CHOICE test kitchen on page 47

**CHOICE's Rebecca Ciaramidaro serves up the latest batch of oven results**

## CHOICE

**CHOICE'S** experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

**CHOICE Shopper**
Members who have subscribed to CHOICE through our website have access to the best deals on products wherever this logo appears. Simply have your CHOICE membership number on hand, the model name and number, and the price you have been quoted. Phone 1300 360 655 and we'll source you the best deal.

**CHOICE Online**
For more related information and articles on this topic, go to **choice.com.au**

**CHOICE Best Buy**
Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.

**CHOICE Green Buy**
Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.

# Reliable types

More than 8500 CHOICE members give **Matthew Steen** the rundown on product reliability

CHOICE would like to give big hand to the 8545 members who completed our somewhat arduous brand reliability survey last year. Because we can't actually test in our labs how reliable a product is, or how long it keeps functioning, your feedback is invaluable in helping us uncover the brands that are built to last.

Our survey is the product of weeks of analysis. It pinpoints:

- the most reliable brands (those with no problems in the past 12 months)
- which brands members are most (and least) likely to purchase again
- why members wouldn't buy their brand again (multiple responses are allowed).

**PRODUCTS**

- Air conditioners
- Cooktops
- Digital cameras
- Dishwashers
- Espresso machines
- Fridges
- Ovens
- Smartphones
- Strollers
- TVs
- Vacuum cleaners
- Washing machines

## Your feedback is invaluable to help us uncover brands that are built to last

This year, our survey covers 12 categories of everyday appliances and electronics (see above), bought by members between 2005 and 2013. For the first time, we asked you questions about the extent of problems you had with your appliance and how long you had to go without it when it broke down.

### Where's my brand?

We screen the data – so if your brand isn't listed here, it's because we didn't have a large enough sample size to report on. We do include the results from these samples, and you'll find them in the tables in the following pages listed as Other.

# COOKTOPS

We had 3682 respondents in this category, most of whom bought a gas cooktop (58%), followed by electric ceramic (20%) and electric induction (17%). In our latest gas cooktop review (*CHOICE*, Apr 13) we recommended **Fisher & Paykel**, **Neff** and **Omega** models.

### Reasons to not buy again

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt there were better brands available, and/or that their cooktop has poor features or design.

**94%** of Bosch owners said they would buy this brand again. Loyalty for the other brands we recommended ranges from 82% (Omega) to 89% (Fisher & Paykel)

**Of those with issues**

- **52%** of cooktops were still fully functional
- **42%** were partially functional
- **6%** could not carry out their main function

For those whose cooktop was not working, 27% reported it wasn't fully operational for about a week or less.

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS ***

- 94% Ariston (64)
- 93% Bosch (277)
- 93% Don't know/can't recall (129)
- 91% Smeg (271)
- 90% Electrolux (173)
- 89% Blanco (209)
- 89% Miele (365)
- 88% Westinghouse (551)
- 87% Chef (135)
- 87% DeLonghi (69)
- 87% Fisher & Paykel (182)
- 86% Omega (146)
- 84% Other^ (1010)
- 79% Ilve (101)
- TOTAL 88% (3682)

DIFFERENCES OF 3% OR MORE BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

# DIGITAL CAMERAS

Our camera survey had just under 7000 respondents, 60% of whom own a compact camera, 29% a DSLR and the remainder mostly bridging cameras. **Canon**, **Nikon**, **Olympus**, **Panasonic** and **Sony** models were recommended in our recent test (*CHOICE*, Dec 13/Jan 14).

### Reasons to not buy again

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt their camera performed poorly, and/or that there were better brands available.

**98%** of Canon owners said they'd buy this brand again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test ranges from 92% (Olympus) to 97% (Nikon)

For those whose camera was not working, 18% reported it was not fully operational for about a week or less.

**Of those with issues**

- **46%** of digital cameras were still fully functional
- **28%** were partially functional
- **26%** could not carry out their main function

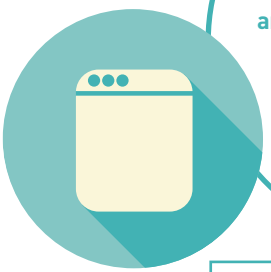
**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS***

- 94% Canon (2786)
- 93% Other^ (300)
- 93% Panasonic (1100)
- 93% Pentax (187)
- 92% Fujifilm (280)
- 92% Nikon (921)
- 91% Samsung (118)
- 91% Sony (669)
- 90% Olympus (496)
- TOTAL 93% (6857)

DIFFERENCES OF 3% OR MORE BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK | REASONS PEOPLE WOULDN'T BUY AGAIN: MULTIPLE RESPONSES WERE ALLOWED IN THIS QUESTION | * THE NUMBER IN BRACKETS IS THE NUMBER OF RESPONSES RECEIVED FOR THAT BRAND. PERCENTAGES ARE ADJUSTED FOR THE AGE OF THE PRODUCT. ^ "OTHER" INCLUDES UNBRANDED PRODUCTS, PRODUCTS FOR WHICH THE BRAND WAS UNKNOWN AND BRANDS THAT DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA FOR SAMPLE SIZE (N = 50 OR MORE OVERALL). UNKNOWN BRANDS ARE LISTED SEPARATELY IN SOME INSTANCES IF SAMPLE SIZE IS SUFFICIENT.

# DISHWASHERS



Just under 5000 people responded for this category, 81% of whom own a built-in dishwasher. The rest have either a of freestanding (12%) or dish drawer (6%) model. **Bosch**, **Miele**, **LG** and **Westinghouse** were recommended in our last review (*CHOICE*, Mar 14).

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt there were better brands available, and/or that their dishwasher performed poorly.

**94%** of Miele and 93% of both Asko and Bosch owners said they'd buy these brands again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test falls between 84% (LG) and 86% (Westinghouse)

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS ***

- 89% Bosch (1285)
- 89% Miele (957)
- 86% AEG-Electrolux (72)
- 86% Asko (359)
- 85% Blanco (91)
- 82% Westinghouse (195)
- 81% Dishlex (384)
- 80% Electrolux (106)
- 76% LG (220)
- 76% Smeg (117)
- 75% Other^ (475)
- 72% Fisher & Paykel (524)
- 69% Whirlpool (71)
- TOTAL 83% (4856)

DIFFERENCES OF 4% OR MORE BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

**Of those with issues**

**42%** of dishwashers were still fully functional

**35%** could not carry out their main function

**22%** were partially functional

For those whose dishwasher wasn't working, 52% said it wasn't fully operational for about a week or less.

# FRIDGES

We had more than 5000 respondents for this product category, a majority of whom own a fridge with a freezer on the bottom (34%) or on the top (32%).

**Of those with issues**

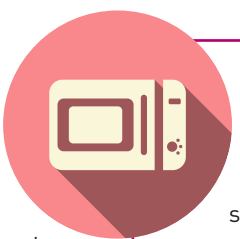
**58%** of fridges were still fully functional

**28%** were partially functional

**13%** could not carry out their main function

53% of those whose fridge wasn't working completely said it wasn't fully operational for a week.

# OVENS



We had more than 4000 respondents for this category, 89% of whom own electric ovens, followed by gas. **Electrolux** and **Westinghouse** models made our most recent test ( page 47).

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt there were better brands available, and/or that their oven performed poorly or had poor features or design.

For those whose oven wasn't working, 38% said it wasn't fully operational for about a week or less.

**95%** of Miele and 94% of Bosch owners said they'd buy these brands again. 86% of Westinghouse and 84% of Electrolux owners would buy that brand again

**Of those with issues**

**47%** of ovens were still fully functional

**34%** were partially functional

**19%** could not carry out their main function

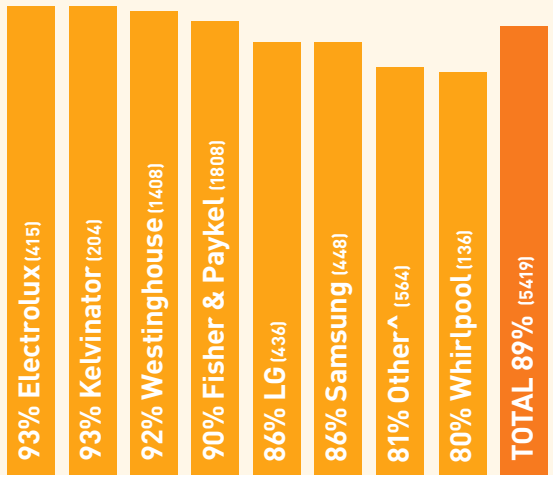
The rest had a mixture of side-by-side (21%), French door (6%) and pigeon pair (5%). **Fisher & Paykel**, **Haier** and **LG** models made our most recent fridge review (*CHOICE*, Mar 14).

**95%** of Electrolux and 94% of Kelvinator and Westinghouse owners said they'd buy these brands again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test falls between 90% (LG) and 92% (Fisher & Paykel)

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt the fridge they have has poor features or design and/or that there were better brands available.

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS***




DIFFERENCES OF 2% OR MORE BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

REFER TO PAGE 40 FOR FOOTNOTES

# SMARTPHONES

The number of respondents for smartphones was just under 7000 members. Most respondents own an **Apple** smartphone.

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt there were better brands available, and/or that their phone performed poorly.

**Of those with issues**

**48%** of smartphones were still fully functional

**35%** were partially functional

**17%** could not carry out their main function

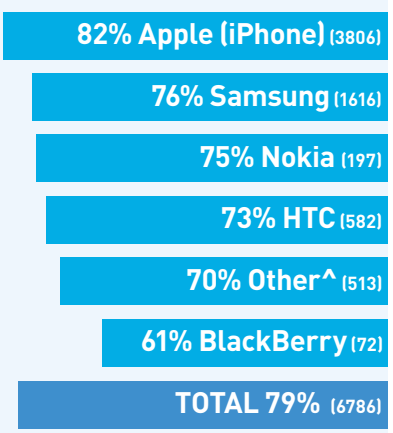
For those whose phone wasn't working completely, 53% said it wasn't fully operational for about a week or less.

**96%** of Apple owners said they'd buy this brand again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test ranges between 79% (Nokia) and 93% (Samsung)

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS***

DIFFERENCES OF 4% OR MORE BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS***




DIFFERENCES OF 4% BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

# STROLLERS

Of the 1000+ respondents, 70% have four- and 29% three-wheeler models. Only **Childcare** and **Steelcraft** made the Worth Considering list in our recent test (*CHOICE*, Jun 13).

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt their stroller had poor features or design, and/or that there were better brands available.

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS***

- 93% Maclaren (108)
- 91% Baby Jogger (124)
- 91% Bugaboo (72)
- 91% Don't know/can't recall (81)
- 88% Mountain Buggy (72)
- 87% Other^ (429)
- 83% Steelcraft (161)
- TOTAL 87% (1047)

DIFFERENCES OF 4% OR MORE BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

**Of those with issues**

**53%** of strollers were still fully functional

**31%** were partially functional

**16%** couldn't carry out their main function

For those whose stroller wasn't working, 26% said it wasn't fully operational for about a week or less.

**99%** of Maclaren owners said they'd buy this brand again. Loyalty for the Steelcraft brand, which was rated Worth Considering in our last test, is 92%

# TVs

The TV survey attracted 7694 respondents, most of whom have some kind of LCD TVs. The remainder have plasma, OLED and CRT. **LG**, **Samsung**, **Sony** and **Panasonic** TVs were recommended in our recent tests (*CHOICE*, Apr 14 or Dec 13/Jan 14).

**99%** of Panasonic owners said they'd buy this brand again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test is 96% (LG, Samsung and Sony)

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt there were better brands available, and/or that their TV performed poorly.

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS***

- 96% Panasonic (1716)
- 94% Toshiba (157)
- 93% Sanyo (97)
- 93% Sharp (183)
- 93% Sony (1660)
- 91% LG (992)
- 91% Samsung (1909)
- 87% Other^ (775)
- 85% Teac (54)
- 84% Philips (69)
- 82% Hisense (82)
- TOTAL 92% (7694)

DIFFERENCES OF 4% OR MORE BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

**Of those with issues**

**48%** of TVs were still fully functional

**30%** were partially functional

**22%** couldn't carry out their main function

For those whose TV wasn't working, 40% reported it was not fully operational for about a week or less.

# COFFEE MACHINES

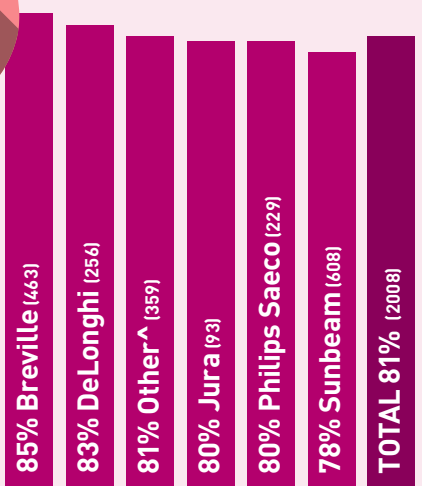
Of the just under 4000 respondednts, 46% have capsule, 37% manual or semi-automatic and the rest auto models. **Philips Breville**, **Sunbeam**, **Rancilio** and **Woolworths** models were recommended in our test (*CHOICE*, Feb 14).

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt there were better brands available, and/or that their machine performed poorly.

**99%** of Maclaren owners said they'd buy this brand again. Loyalty for the Steelcraft brand, which was rated Worth Considering in our last test, is 92%

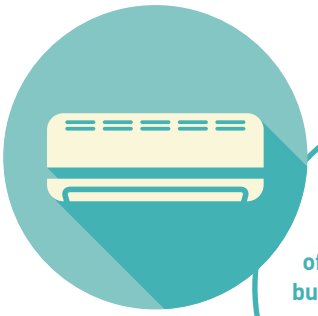
**MANUAL/SEMI-AUTOMATIC BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS***




DIFFERENCES OF 4% BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

# AIR CONDITIONERS

The air conditioner survey had 3777 respondents, of whom 65% have a split system and 23% have a ducted system. The remainder have a mix of ducted evaporative and portable, wall units and portable evaporative. In our last split system air con review, **Fujitsu**, **LG**, **Mitsubishi Electric**, **Mitsubishi Heavy Industries** and **Samsung** models made our recommended list (*CHOICE*, Oct 13).



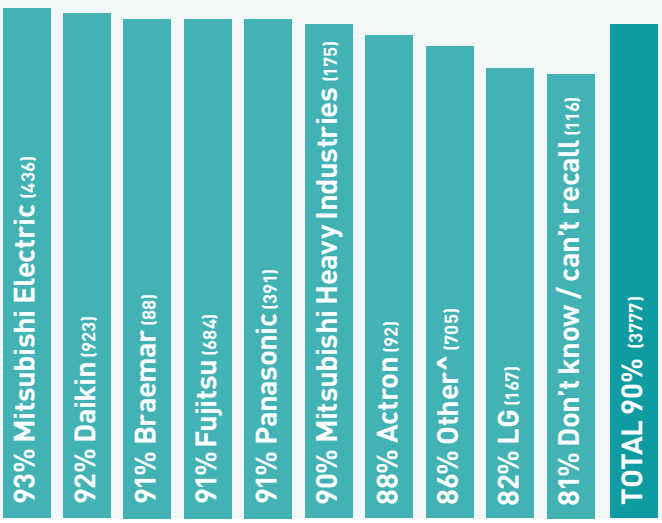
**98%**

**of Daikin owners said they'd buy this brand again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test ranges between 87% (LG) and 96% (Fujitsu)**

### Reasons to not buy again

Of those who wouldn't buy the same brand again, most felt there were better brands available, and/or that their air conditioner performed poorly.

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS ***




DIFFERENCES OF 3% BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

**Of those with issues**

**47%** of air cons couldn't carry out their main function

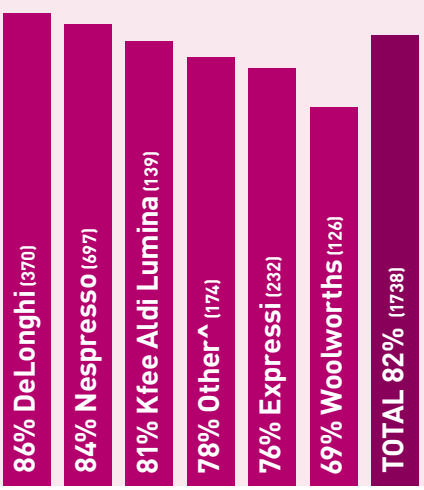
**30%** were still fully functional

**23%** were partially functional

For those whose air conditioner was not working, 38% reported it was not fully operational for about a week or less.

REFER TO PAGE 40 FOR FOOTNOTES

**CAPSULE BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS ***




DIFFERENCES OF 5% BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

For those whose machines weren't working completely, a third reported it wasn't fully operational for around a week or less.

**Of those with issues**

35% of coffee machines were still fully functional
35% could not carry out their main function
30% were partially functional

**95%**

**of Breville, DeLonghi and Nespresso owners said they'd buy these brands again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test falls between 89% (Philips) and 93% (Rancilio)**

# VACUUMS

This sample size covered just over 6000 respondents, 76% of whom have canister-style vacs. Roughly half of these were bagless, the rest bagged. **Bosch**, **Dyson**, **Electrolux**, **Miele**, **Nilfisk** and **Vax** models were recommended in our last test (*CHOICE*, Apr 14).

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same vac brand again, most felt there were better brands available, and/or that their model had poor features or design and/or performed badly.

**97%**

**of Miele and 95% of Dyson owners said they'd buy these brands again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test falls between 82% (Electrolux) and 90% (Nilfisk)**

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS ***

DIFFERENCES OF 5% BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.

**Of those with issues**

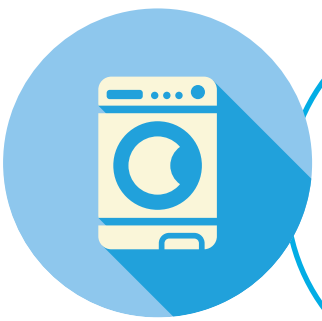
For those whose vacuum cleaner was not working, 39% reported it was not fully operational for around a week or less.

# WASHING MACHINES

This sample size covered just under 6000 respondents, of whom 66% own front loaders, 33% have top loaders, with the remainder owning mostly washer/dryers. **Bosch**, **Fisher & Paykel**, **LG** and **Samsung** models were recommended in our latest test (see page 60).

**Reasons to not buy again**

Of those who wouldn't buy the same washer brand again, most felt their washing machine performed poorly, and/or that there were better brands available.

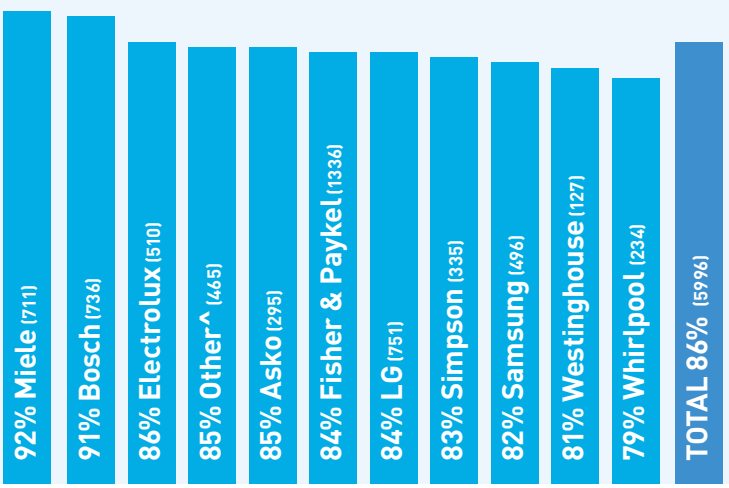


**96%**

**of both Miele and Bosch owners said they'd buy these brands again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our latest test ranges between 89% (F&P) and 94% (Samsung)**

**BRANDS WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS ***

DIFFERENCES OF 3% OR MORE BETWEEN BRANDS ARE SIGNIFICANT.




**Of those with issues**

**48%** of washers were still fully functional

**31%** could not carry out their main function

**21%** were partially functional

For those whose washer wasn't working completely, about 60% said it was not fully operational for about a week or less.

REFER TO PAGE 40 FOR FOOTNOTES

## Nutshell

- We have the results for 10 newly tested ovens, priced from $999 to $4599.
- With so many cooking functions available, which ones do you really need?

# Kitchen bunfight

Two brands remain the frontrunners in the battle for the best electric oven, says **Rebecca Ciaramidaro**

Many ovens these days are great at cooking food. But with so many options available, choosing the right one can be daunting. An oven that performs well and is easy to use and clean is the main priority – find one that ticks all these boxes and you'll be one happy customer.

Fiona Mair, CHOICE's home economist, put 10 new ovens to the test, cooking chicken, pizza, toast, scones and meringues. They're all worth considering based on cooking performance, but when it comes to ease of use, our recommended model, the Electrolux EVEP613SA (see right), is the clear standout.

### Multi-function cooking

We've tested a couple of ovens that, in addition to an already long list of functions, also come with a selection of automatic cooking functions. The Miele H6461BP has automatic programs for dishes such as roasts, cakes, breads and biscuits. It takes you through the whole process, with preset cooking times and temperatures (that you can adjust) as well as telling you what shelf to use, the level of browning you'd like and when to put the food in. This technology comes with a high price tag, but it does take the guesswork out of cooking.

But how many functions are enough and which ones will you get the most use out of? As long as your oven has the following, you'll be able to create delicious meals with minimal fuss.

- **Classic or base bake** uses the bottom element only and is useful for achieving crispy bases.
- **Conventional bake** uses the top and bottom elements. It provides reasonably even heating, but tends to be slightly hotter towards the top, allowing food to brown. It's ideal for cooking cakes, roasts and casseroles.
- **Grill element** is great for grilling foods that require short cooking times, like melting cheese on toast, or browning

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## WHAT TO BUY

**93%**

**Electrolux EVEP613SA**

### Good points

- Very good, easy-to-use digital controls
- Each function has adjustable preset temperatures
- Excellent visibility through the door
- Pyrolytic cleaning
- Oven door and glass can be removed for cleaning
- Fingerprint-resistant stainless steel
- Smokeless grill tray
- Grill element drops down for easy cleaning of the oven ceiling
- Comprehensive instructions with a cooking guide

### Bad points

- None to mention

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

the top of a gratin. You don't need to pre-heat the oven to use the grill - just use the top shelf and set the oven to the highest temperature.

- **Fan-forced** You're more than likely to get the most use out of this function and you'll be hard pressed to find an oven that doesn't come with this basic feature. With fan-forced, heat comes from an element at the back of the oven and is circulated by a fan that is surrounded by the element. The oven heats up quite quickly, and it's great for multi-shelf cooking, roasts, cakes, casseroles and baking foods. It's similar to conventional bake but is faster and gives more even heat distribution.
- **Fan grill** is good for cooking chicken and other roasts or larger cuts of meat.

| | COSTS | | PERFORMANCE | | | | | | | | FEATURES & FUNCTIONS | | | | | | | | | SPECIFICATIONS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Price ($) | Running costs ($)* | Overall score (%) | Performance (%) | Ease of use (%) | Grill toast (%) | Scones (%) | Meringues (%) | Roast chicken (%) | Pizza (%) | Pyrolytic function | Catalytic liners | Telescopic runners | Smokeless grill tray | Clock | Fan grill | Pizza functions ** | Fan assist | Top and bottom | Claimed external dimensions (mm, H x W x D) |
| • **Electrolux** EVEP613SA | 2869 | 295 | 93 | 93 | 93 | 90 | 90 | 100 | 90 | 95 | ✓ | | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 598 x 596 x 573 |
| **Westinghouse** POR667S | 1239 | 326 | 92 | 94 | 90 | 95 | 93 | 95 | 85 | 100 | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 566 |
| **Westinghouse** POR883S | 2479 | 302 | 91 | 88 | 95 | 90 | 80 | 100 | 85 | 85 | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 573 |
| **Westinghouse** POR668S | 1609 | 323 | 89 | 91 | 85 | 90 | 83 | 90 | 90 | 100 | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | 595 x 596 x 570 |
| • **Westinghouse** POR783S | 1929 | 330 | 89 | 93 | 83 | 90 | 88 | 100 | 90 | 95 | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 595 x 596 x 570 |
| • **Electrolux** EVE611SA | 1539 | 330 | 87 | 89 | 84 | 90 | 83 | 90 | 85 | 95 | | ✓ | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | 597 x 596 x 573 |
| • **Miele** H 2661 B Clean Steel | 1999 | 210 | 86 | 97 | 70 | 85 | 98 | 100 | 100 | 100 | | ✓ | (C) | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | 596 x 595 x 570 |
| **Bosch** HBA63S451A | 2049 | 315 | 85 | 92 | 74 | 95 | 90 | 100 | 100 | 75 | ✓ | | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 548 |
| • **Miele** H6461BP | 4599 | 331 | 85 | 92 | 75 | 85 | 83 | 100 | 100 | 90 | ✓ | | (C) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | 596 x 595 x 570 |
| **Westinghouse** POR881S | 2109 | 262 | 85 | 88 | 80 | 85 | 88 | 100 | 85 | 80 | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | 595 x 596 x 570 |
| **Chef** EOC647S | 1059 | 343 | 84 | 87 | 80 | 90 | 80 | 100 | 85 | 80 | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | 595 x 595 x 567 |
| • **Fisher & Paykel** OB60SL9DEX1 | 1999 | 450 | 84 | 90 | 75 | 90 | 80 | 100 | 85 | 95 | | ✓ | 1 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 595 x 594 x 567 |
| **Bosch** HBG73S550A | 2499 | 284 | 82 | 88 | 73 | 90 | 80 | 85 | 90 | 95 | ✓ | | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 548 |
| **Chef** EOC627W (A) | 799 | 310 | 82 | 84 | 80 | 75 | 80 | 85 | 90 | 90 | | | (C) | | | | | | | 595 x 595 x 567 |
| **Westinghouse** POR663S | 1009 | 275 | 82 | 85 | 78 | 75 | 80 | 100 | 90 | 80 | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | 595 x 596 x 568 |
| **Bosch** HBA63B250A | 1849 | 246 | 81 | 86 | 74 | 85 | 83 | 90 | 90 | 80 | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 548 |
| • **Bosch** HBG43S450A | 1649 | 316 | 80 | 85 | 73 | 85 | 75 | 100 | 85 | 80 | | ✓ | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 548 |
| **Belling** BI60MFS | 849 | 331 | 79 | 89 | 65 | 70 | 80 | 100 | 95 | 100 | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 585 x 595 x 550 |
| **Samsung** BF1N4T015 | 799 | 295 | 79 | 88 | 65 | 80 | 95 | 80 | 100 | 85 | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 566 |
| **Whirlpool** AKZM654/IX | 848 | 276 | 79 | 91 | 60 | 100 | 88 | 95 | 85 | 85 | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 538 |
| • **Omega** OO687X | 999 | 328 | 78 | 87 | 64 | 65 | 90 | 100 | 90 | 90 | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 595 x 594 x 550 |
| • **IKEA** Nutid OV9 | 1499 | 274 | 77 | 88 | 60 | 90 | 88 | 100 | 90 | 70 | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 538 |
| **Omega** OO6A1X | 1399 | 296 | 77 | 85 | 64 | 60 | 80 | 100 | 100 | 85 | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 585 x 595 x 550 |
| **St George** 8500200PS | 2999 | 343 | 77 | 85 | 65 | 60 | 90 | 85 | 90 | 100 | (B) | (B) | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 620 x 597 x 585 |
| • **DeLonghi** DE608M | 1499 | 329 | 76 | 83 | 66 | 85 | 85 | 100 | 75 | 70 | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 594 x 594 x 556 |
| **Euromaid** 8 Multifunction Oven MS8 | 899 | 269 | 75 | 82 | 65 | 75 | 80 | 80 | 100 | 75 | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 595 x 594 x 567 |
| **Whirlpool** AKPM759/IX | 688 | 343 | 75 | 78 | 70 | 80 | 70 | 80 | 80 | 80 | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 595 x 595 x 560 |
| **Ariston** OS99DPIX | 2999 | 395 | 74 | 81 | 64 | 65 | 85 | 90 | 85 | 80 | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | (D) | 595 x 595 x 545 |
| **Euromaid** 7 Multifunction Fan Forced BS8 | 696 | 378 | 70 | 73 | 66 | 70 | 75 | 65 | 75 | 80 | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 595 x 594 x 567 |

## PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

**92% Westinghouse** POR667S (*CHOICE*, Sept 12) $1239 Best Buy

**91% Westinghouse** POR883S (*CHOICE*, Sept 12) $2479

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

See *CHOICE*, Feb 13 for information on what to look for in ovens

| Measured internal dimensions (mm, H x W x D) | Measured internal baking volume (L) | Contact |
|---|---|---|
| 320 x 480 x 420 | 65 | electrolux.com.au |
| 300 x 480 x 420 | 61 | westinghouse.com.au |
| 300 x 480 x 420 | 60 | westinghouse.com.au |
| 320 x 475 x 420 | 64 | westinghouse.com.au |
| 303 x 472 x 420 | 60 | westinghouse.com.au |
| 320 x 474 x 420 | 64 | electrolux.com.au |
| 360 x 480 x 415 | 72 | miele.com.au |
| 330 x 490 x 410 | 67 | bosch-home.com.au |
| 360 x 480 x 416 | 72 | miele.com.au |
| 290 x 478 x 425 | 59 | westinghouse.com.au |
| 270 x 480 x 420 | 55 | chefappliances.com.au |
| 320 x 457 x 432 | 63 | fisherpaykel.com.au |
| 300 x 490 x 410 | 60 | bosch-home.com.au |
| 290 x 460 x 430 | 60 | chefappliances.com.au |
| 315 x 480 x 420 | 65 | westinghouse.com.au |
| 295 x 490 x 405 | 59 | bosch-home.com.au |
| 300 x 480 x 420 | 60 | bosch-home.com.au |
| 330 x 480 x 385 | 62 | belling.com.au |
| 320 x 470 x 420 | 63 | samsung.com.au |
| 310 x 455 x 400 | 56 | whirlpool.com.au |
| 304 x 473 x 402 | 58 | omegaappliances.com.au |
| 289 x 440 x 414 | 53 | ikea.com/au |
| 260 x 455 x 380 | 45 | omegaappliances.com.au |
| 400 x 480 x 400 | 77 | sga.com.au |
| 265 x 454 x 420 | 51 | delonghi.com.au |
| 310 x 480 x 420 | 62 | euromaid.com.au |
| 310 x 455 x 415 | 59 | whirlpool.com.au |
| 355 x 460 x 420 | 69 | aristonbrand.com |
| 310 x 475 x 415 | 60 | euromaid.com.au |

## ABOUT THE REST

The **Westinghouse POR783S** has well-labelled touch controls. Each function has adjustable preset temperatures, and visibility through the door is excellent. It has a smokeless grill tray, child lock and very good coverage of catalytic liners, the grill element drops down for cleaning and the oven door and glass can be removed. The exterior has fingerprint-resistant stainless steel.

The **Electrolux EVE611SA** has large dial controls with clear labelling. It has a smokeless grill tray and excellent visibility through the door. It has very good coverage of catalytic liners, the oven door and glass can be removed and the grill element drops down for cleaning. The exterior has fingerprint-resistant stainless steel.

The **Miele H 2661 B Clean Steel** has retractable dial controls and child-lock feature. Viewing food on the top shelf is difficult and there's no protective shield over the grill element. One of the oven shelves has to be used as a grill rack; the shelf stoppers aren't very effective, and if pulled too far the shelves can tilt slightly. The exterior is easy to clean and the oven door and glass can be removed. The grill element drops down and there is only a catalytic liner on the back wall.

The **Miele H6461BP** has well-labelled touch controls but you might need to refer to the instructions, especially when using the auto programs. Viewing food on the top shelf is difficult and there's no protective shield over the grill element. It has a moisture-plus function that uses bursts of steam during cooking. It has a smokeless grill tray but no telescopic runners, and the shelf stoppers aren't very effective. The oven has pyrolytic-safe accessories, the door and glass can be removed and the grill element drops down for cleaning. The exterior is easy to clean and it has a child-lock feature.

The **Fisher & Paykel** has well-labelled dial controls. Each function has adjustable preset temperatures and visibility through the door is excellent. The grill tray needs to sit on another tray as it doesn't slide into the shelf supports, and there's no protective shield over the grill element. There is OK coverage of catalytic liners, the oven door and glass can be removed and the grill element drops down.

The **Bosch HBG43S450A** has retractable dial controls with small labelling. It has a smokeless grill tray, telescopic runners and a protective shield in front of the grill element. Visibility through the door is excellent, but the position of the light can make it difficult to remove/replace the globe. The shelf stoppers aren't very effective. It has excellent coverage of catalytic liners and the oven door and glass can be removed, but the grill element doesn't drop down.

The **Omega OO687X** has well-labelled dial controls. There's good visibility through the door, but the light position can make it difficult to replace the globe. It has no smokeless grill tray or protective shield in front of the grill element. The oven door can be removed, but the grill element doesn't drop down.

The **IKEA** has retractable dial controls with small labelling. It has a manual door lock you need to lift when opening the door. If the door isn't closed properly the oven won't operate. It has a meat probe thermometer but no smokeless grill tray. Shelf stoppers aren't very effective and visibility through the door isn't great. The cooling fan is noisy during pyrolytic cleaning. It has moulded shelf supports, and the grill has a protective shield that can be removed for cleaning. The oven door can be removed, but the stainless steel and glass exterior shows finger marks.

The **DeLonghi** has retractable dial controls. There's no protective shield in front of the grill element and the grill tray has no stoppers, so if you're not using the telescopic runners it can be pulled out easily. The oven door and glass can be removed and the grill element drops down for cleaning. ■

**USING THE TABLE Price** Rec retail, as of Mar 14. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). **Measured internal baking volume** We measure the internal volume from the lowest shelf of the oven or baking tray (if supplied) to the grill element, side-wall to side-wall, and the rear wall to the door. **Running costs** Based on running the oven at 170°C for one hour, three times per week for 10 years at 26c/kWh. Where available, the fan-forced function is used; if not, fan assist is used, and for models that don't have this function, the top and bottom elements (convection or traditional bake) are used. **TABLE NOTES** * 3hrs/week over 10yrs. ** Models that have bottom + fan, bottom + fan-forced or pizza mode are included in this column. **(A)** Technically similar to the Chef EOC627S. **(B)** Has a steam-clean function. **(C)** Available as an optional extra. **(D)** The top and bottom elements may be used in one of the automatic cooking functions, but we don't know for sure.

# Tea 'n toast

**Chris Barnes** finds that sleek styling and a high price don't always mean a better toaster or kettle

## Nutshell

- We review 30 kettles and 30 toasters, including 28 newly tested models.
- Four stovetop kettles are included this time to see how well old-school design measures up against electric models.

Kettles and toasters are usually on display at all times in the kitchen, so it's no wonder there's a market for style with these everyday appliances. Retro looks, bold colours, space-age style or just plain old white plastic, there's one to match most tastes.

But with these products, style (and price) is no guarantee of quality. Given the performance of some smart-looking pricey models, we wonder whether some manufacturers are spending too much time in the design studio and not enough in the test lab.

The kettle and toaster tables (see pages 52 and 54) don't include any models from reviews in 2011 and earlier. While some of those models are still available, we can't be sure that current stock is identical to the models we tested.

## Toasters

When buying a toaster, you have a few basic questions to ask.

- **Two-slice or four slice?** This depends on the size of your household and how much toast you eat.
- **Side-by-side or long slot?** A long-slot toaster is good for longer slices.
- **Style and price** You still have to like the look of it, after all.

In 2013 we tested the Magimix Vision glass-walled toaster ($399) and found it sadly disappointing. This test includes another glass-walled model, the Russell Hobbs Perfect Toast ($130). It offers a more attractive price tag than the Magimix, but unfortunately even worse performance. It's poor at toasting evenly and at toasting a single slice, and only OK at producing the same colour cycle after cycle and at toasting frozen bread. See-through toasters are a great idea, but don't yet seem to be up to the basic job of making good toast.

Note that we've revised our scoring system for toasters, and the table (page 52) shows the new scores for both current and previously tested models.

# WHAT TO BUY

## TWO-SLICE

### 83%
### KitchenAid 5AKMT223ER0

#### Good points
- Very good at browning evenly, toasting a single slice and producing the same toast colour cycle after cycle
- Good at toasting frozen bread
- Excellent controls

#### Bad points
- None to mention

### 83%
### Sunbeam Maestro 2 TA6240

#### Good points
- Excellent for browning evenly
- Very good at producing the same toast colour cycle after cycle
- Good at toasting a single slice and frozen bread
- Very good controls

#### Bad points
- None to mention

### PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

(*CHOICE*, May 13)
**80% Breville** BTA425 $50

## FOUR-SLICE

### 81%
### Russell Hobbs Kitchen Metallics RHMT4RED

#### Good points
- Excellent at browning evenly and toasting a single slice
- Very good at producing the same toast colour cycle after cycle
- Good at toasting frozen bread
- Very good controls

#### Bad points
- None to mention

### PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

(*CHOICE*, May 13)
**80% Russell Hobbs** Silhouette 20640 $140

### ABOUT THE REST

Any toaster on test with an overall score of 70% or more is worth considering. But several others don't perform particularly well. The **Cuisinart CPT-440A, DeLonghi Brillante** and **Dualit** toasters are particularly disappointing. For their prices you'd expect excellent performance, but they're not good at browning evenly, toasting frozen bread or producing the same toast colour cycle after cycle.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The **crumb tray** should have no sharp edges and it should be easy to remove crumbs. It should be easy to slide out or flip down and insert after emptying, as well as have no places for crumbs to accumulate over time. Empty and clean the tray frequently to avoid crumb build-up and insects, and shake the toaster upside down for a more thorough clean.

**Exterior that's easy to clean**, with no crevices to trap dirt and no sharp edges to scratch the user or the benchtop. Stainless steel may look attractive but often requires more effort to clean than a plastic exterior. The temperature of the exterior during toasting should remain cool enough to touch, and not exceed 60°C.

A **height-lift carriage** allows you to raise smaller items above the toaster slots.

A **separate carriage control/ temperature control** for four-slice toasters gives you direct control over each pair of slots, which is handy if you're toasting different bread types or to suit different preferences.

**Toasting chambers** should be wide and long enough to insert and remove a variety of bread shapes and sizes. A long-slot toaster is the way to go if you prefer to toast long slices of bread.

**Controls** should be easy to read and operate, and positioned away from hot areas.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

| TWO-SLICE TOASTERS | | PERFORMANCE | | | | FEATURES | | | | SPECIFICATIONS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Price ($) | Overall score (%) | Performance score (%) | Ease of use score (%) | Toasting time (min:sec) | Cord storage | Reheat setting | Frozen bread setting | High-lift carriage | Number of slots | Dimensions (cm, L x W x H) | Bread carriage dimensions (mm, L x W x H) | Warranty (years) |
| • **KitchenAid** 5AKMT223ER0 | 169 | 83 | 79 | 92 | 3:50 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 2 | 29 x 19 x 21 | 140 x 30 x 145 | 2 |
| • **Sunbeam** Maestro 2 TA6240 | 100 | 83 | 84 | 82 | 3:20 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 29 x 20 x 20 | 145 x 35 x 130 | 1 |
| **Breville** BTA425 | 50 | 80 | 80 | 80 | 3:04 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 29 x 18 x 20 | 145 x 30 x 130 | 1 |
| **Cuisinart** CPT-220TNA | 100 | 77 | 77 | 78 | 3:09 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 27 x 18 x 19 | 135 x 28 x 120 | 3 |
| **Kenwood** kMix TTM020A | 105 | 76 | 74 | 82 | 3:30 | ✓ | | | ✓ | 2 | 27 x 16 x 18 | 135 x 25 x 125 | 1 |
| • **Breville** The Smart Toast BTA825 | 124 | 75 | 71 | 84 | 3:38 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 29 x 18 x 20 | 140 x 30 x 130 | 2 |
| **Kambrook** Essentials KT50 | 25 | 75 | 73 | 80 | 3:02 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 26 x 16 x 18 | 130 x 25 x 115 | 1 |
| • **Kambrook** Wide Slot KT20 | 25 | 74 | 71 | 80 | 3:20 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 27 x 16 x 19 | 130 x 25 x 115 | 1 |
| • **Morphy Richards** Elipta 44872AUS | 120 | 74 | 71 | 80 | 3:30 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 27 x 19 x 20 | 140 x 30 x 140 | 2 |
| **Circulon** 566990-C | 150 | 72 | 69 | 80 | 3:15 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 30 x 17 x 20 | 145 x 30 x 130 | 2 |
| **DeLonghi** Icona CTO2003 | 99 | 72 | 72 | 72 | 3:16 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 33 x 19 x 21 | 140 x 30 x 140 | 1 |
| • **Bodum** Bistro 10709 | 80 | 67 | 69 | 62 | 3:17 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 27 x 15 x 22 | 140 x 25 x 110 | 2 |
| **Magimix** Vision 11528AU | 399 | 66 | 62 | 76 | 3:40 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | 40 x 18 x 22 | 260 x 35 x 145 | 3 |
| **Sunbeam** Retro TA5200 | 80 | 64 | 61 | 70 | 2:48 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 29 x 18 x 18 | 135 x 35 x 120 | 1 |
| **Russell Hobbs** Seville T2707SAU | 50 | 61 | 55 | 76 | 4:19 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 28 x 18 x 19 | 140 x 35 x 105 | 2 |
| **Tiffany** Cool Touch TAT47 | 20 | 60 | 57 | 66 | 3:50 | | ✓ | ✓ | | 2 | 27 x 15 x 18 | 130 x 15 x 110 | 1 |
| • **Russell Hobbs** Perfect Toast RHT100RAU | 130 | 58 | 51 | 74 | 4:10 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | 37 x 16 x 20 | 265 x 35 x 135 | 2 |
| • **Dualit** The Toaster D2BMHAU | 320 | 53 | 48 | 64 | 2:25 | | | | | 2 | 26 x 25 x 23 | 125 x 20 x 130 | 5 |

| FOUR-SLICE TOASTERS | | PERFORMANCE | | | | FEATURES | | | | | SPECIFICATIONS | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Price ($) | Overall score (%) | Performance score (%) | Ease of use score (%) | Toasting time (min:sec) | Cord storage | Reheat setting | Frozen bread setting | Separate carriage/ temperature control | High-lift carriage | Number of slots | Dimensions (cm, L x W x H) | Bread carriage dimensions (mm, L x W x H) |
| • **Russell Hobbs** Kitchen Metallics RHMT4RED | 120 | 81 | 84 | 74 | 4:33 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | ✓ | 4 | 31 x 28 x 19 | 145 x 30 x 120 |
| **Russell Hobbs** Silhouette 20640 | 140 | 80 | 83 | 74 | 3:10 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓/ | ✓ | 2 | 42 x 18 x 20 | 260 x 25 x 120 |
| **Cuisinart** CPT-240TNA | 149 | 79 | 79 | 78 | 3:10 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | ✓ | 4 | 29 x 28 x 19 | 135 x 28 x 120 |
| **KitchenAid** 5AKMT423ER0 | 229 | 73 | 65 | 90 | 4:00 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | | 4 | 33 x 29 x 21 | 140 x 30 x 140 |
| • **Breville** The Bit More BTA430 | 62 | 71 | 64 | 86 | 3:20 | ✓ | | ✓ | -/- | ✓ | 2 | 40 x 18 x 19 | 255 x 30 x 130 |
| **Kambrook** Profile KT450 | 70 | 68 | 64 | 76 | 4:36 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | ✓ | 4 | 31 x 27 x 20 | 135 x 32 x 125 |
| **Raco** Deco 53662-C | 160 | 67 | 67 | 68 | 3:19 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | ✓ | 4 | 29 x 31 x 20 | 150 x 28 x 125 |
| **Breville** The Smart Toast BTA830 | 180 | 64 | 53 | 90 | 4:13 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | -/- | | 2 | 40 x 18 x 20 | 250 x 30 x 140 |
| **Morphy Richards** Accents 44737 | 120 | 61 | 55 | 76 | 4:00 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | ✓ | 4 | 29 x 26 x 20 | 140 x 30 x 125 |
| • **Cuisinart** CPT-440A | 199 | 60 | 46 | 92 | 3:55 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | | 4 | 29 x 26 x 20 | 135 x 28 x 135 |
| • **DeLonghi** Brillante CTJ4003.BK | 129 | 59 | 50 | 80 | 3:40 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/ | ✓ | 4 | 31 x 29 x 21 | 140 x 30 x 140 |
| **DeLonghi** Icona CTO4003 | 134 | 53 | 45 | 72 | 3:18 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | ✓ | 4 | 31 x 33 x 21 | 140 x 30 x 140 |

**USING THE TABLES** Price Recommended retail, as of December 2013. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (70% – browning evenness and repeatability, single slice and frozen bread) and ease
For, page 51. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. All toasters made in China except the Dualit (UK).

| Contact |
|---|
| kitchenaid.com.au |
| sunbeam.com.au |
| breville.com.au |
| cuisinart.com.au |
| kenwood-australia.com |
| breville.com.au |
| kambrook.com.au |
| kambrook.com.au |
| morphyrichards.com.au |
| cookwarebrands.com.au |
| delonghi.com.au |
| bodum.com |
| magimix.com.au |
| sunbeam.com.au |
| russellhobbs.com.au |
| gafcontrol.com.au |
| russellhobbs.com.au |
| jrclassictrends.com.au |

| Warranty (years) | Contact |
|---|---|
| 2 | russellhobbs.com.au |
| 2 | russellhobbs.com.au |
| 3 | cusinart.com.au |
| 2 | kitchenaid.com.au |
| 1 | breville.com.au |
| 1 | kambrook.com.au |
| 2 | raco.com.au |
| 2 | breville.com.au |
| 2 | morphyrichards.com.au |
| 3 | cusinart.com.au |
| 1 | delonghi.com.au |
| 1 | delonghi.com.au |

of use (30%). **Features** See What to Look

# Kettles

The cordless electric kettle is standard in most homes these days, but there is still a market for the stovetop kettle. We've tested four modern versions to see how they compare. And as you'll see in the table, (page 54) we found little to distinguish performance and ease of use between them. The basic $30 Raco and the upmarket $189 Le Creuset boil water equally effectively.

The stovetop kettles were tested on an induction cooktop, and as a result they boiled water comparatively quickly; boiling time may be slower on other cooktops. We found they were only OK for ease of use due to the lids being rather difficult to remove, and only OK for balance and handle comfort.

As for energy efficiency, they're marginally worse than an electric kettle. On a stovetop some heat is lost into the air and the cooking surface (an induction cooktop is the most efficient in this respect, so efficiency will be even less on other cooktop types), while an electric kettle has relatively little heat loss so almost all the energy is used to boil the water.

## 82%
## Breville The Smart Kettle BKE825

### Good points
- Cord storage
- Audible boil reminder
- Five preset temperatures and they're reasonably accurate
- Very good controls
- Quiet
- Easy to fill up with water

### Bad points
- The water level isn't easy to see

## 80%
## Homemaker Quiet Boil F-743SQ

### Good points
- Cord storage
- Very good controls
- Quiet
- Easy to fill up with water

### Bad points
- None to mention

## 80%
## Morphy Richards Meno 43892

### Good points
- Cord storage
- Audible boil reminder
- Very good controls
- Very quiet

### Bad points
- The kettle has to be tilted a fair way towards the end of the pour and it becomes uncomfortable on the wrist to hold
- The water level is difficult to see

## PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

**79% Sunbeam** Café Series KE9600 Variable Temperature $129
(*CHOICE*, May 13)

For information on how we test, see **choice.com.au/kettles** and **choice.com.au/toasters**

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## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A **comfortable handle** with enough finger room to avoid contact with the potentially hot surface of the kettle's body. The kettle should feel balanced and not too heavy, even when full.

**Wide spout or lid** makes it easy to fill the kettle. Lids should open easily and preferably be hinged so you won't lose them.

**Water level indicator** should be clearly marked and easy to read from both sides, making the kettle easy for both left- and right-handed use.

**Indicator lights** should be bright and obvious so you can see them even in a well-lit kitchen.

**Preset temperatures** Several models can be set to a range of temperatures (see the table, right), which is handy if you're particular about water temperatures for making tea. We found the Sunbeam KE9600, KE9450 and KitchenAid somewhat inaccurate at various settings, but the Breville, Cuisinart and Sunbeam KE5200 are reasonably accurate at all settings.

**"Off" warning** to let you know the water has boiled. A noisy kettle probably doesn't need one, but for a quieter model, a tone or a click as the switch resets could be handy.

## KETTLES

| | |
|---|---|
| ELECTRIC | • **Breville** The Smart Kettle BKE825 |
| | • **Homemaker** Quiet Boil F-743SQ |
| | • **Morphy Richards** Meno 43892 |
| | **Sunbeam** Café Series KE9600 Variable Temperature |
| | • **KitchenAid** 5KEK1722ACU0 |
| | **Tefal** Avanti KI110 |
| | • **Sunbeam** Glass Temperature Kettle KE9450 |
| | • **Tiffany** 1.7L Cordless Kettle KT340 |
| | **Magimix** Jug 11696AU |
| | **Morphy Richards** Accents Brushed KT43866C REV1 |
| | • **Breville** The Crystal Clear BKE595 |
| | **Sunbeam** Silentio KE7450 |
| | **Cuisinart** CPK-17A |
| | **Kenwood** kMix SJM037 |
| | **Russell Hobbs** Silhouette Glass 20793 |
| | • **Sunbeam** Retro Kettle KE5200 |
| | **Breville** Classic Dome BKE550 |
| | **Kambrook** Profile Stainless KSK220R |
| | **Raco** Deco 53644-C |
| | **Russell Hobbs** Seville 18152AU |
| | • **Russell Hobbs** Heritage Kettle RHK32BLK |
| | **Circulon** 56697-C |
| | **Morphy Richards** Illuma Jug 43128 |
| | • **DeLonghi** Brillante KBJ2001.BK |
| | • **Bodum** Bistro 11445 |
| | • **Kambrook** Classic Dome KSK76W |
| STOVETOP | • **Raco** 2.4L Whistling Kettle 50959 |
| | • **Circulon** 2.5L Whistling Teakettle |
| | • **Le Creuset** Traditional Kettle 92000900 |
| | • **Cuisinart** Perfectemp Teakettle PTK-330RA |

## ABOUT THE REST

The remaining electric kettles with overall scores of 70% or more are worth considering. Lower-scoring models are comparatively noisy and/or slower to boil. The bottom two in the table are only OK for ease of use. The **Bodum**'s lid doesn't close properly, so there is water coming out next to the spout, and its handle is uncomfortable to hold; the **Kambrook Classic Dome KSK76W** has to be tilted a fair way towards the end of the pour, so it becomes uncomfortable on the wrist to hold, and you can't see the water level without removing the lid. ■

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

| | PERFORMANCE | | | | | | | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Price ($) | Overall score (%) | Ease of use score (%) | Noise score (%) | Boiling time performance score (%) | Energy efficiency score (%) | Noise (dBA) | Boil time (min:sec) | Capacity (L) | Weight (kg) | Footprint (cm) | Preset temperatures | Lid type | Material | Contact |
| 150 | 82 | 84 | 80 | 77 | 84 | 54 | 3:12 | 1.7 | 0.99 | 16 | 5 | Hinged | Painted metal | breville.com.au |
| 29 | 80 | 82 | 80 | 70 | 85 | 53 | 3:24 | 1.7 | 0.76 | 16 | | Hinged | Stainless steel | kmart.com.au |
| 150 | 80 | 75 | 90 | 62 | 82 | 46 | 3:37 | 1.5 | 1.15 | 22 | | Removable | Stainless steel | morphyrichards.com.au |
| 129 | 79 | 85 | 70 | 85 | 85 | 59 | 2:58 | 1.8 | 1.23 | 15 | 5 | Hinged | Stainless steel | sunbeam.com.au |
| 199 | 75 | 84 | 60 | 83 | 88 | 62 | 3:02 | 1.7 | 1.12 | 15 | 6 | Hinged | Painted metal | kitchenaid.com.au |
| 60 | 75 | 85 | 60 | 84 | 85 | 63 | 3:00 | 1.7 | 0.88 | 16 | | Hinged | Stainless steel | tefal.com.au |
| 100 | 74 | 78 | 70 | 64 | 88 | 57 | 3:34 | 1.2 | 0.76 | 15 | 4 | Removable | Glass/plastic | sunbeam.com.au |
| 25 | 74 | 74 | 70 | 77 | 88 | 57 | 3:11 | 1.7 | 0.49 | 16 | | Hinged | Plastic | gafcontrol.com.au |
| 220 | 74 | 83 | 60 | 89 | 83 | 64 | 2:52 | 1.8 | 1.60 | 16 | | Hinged | Stainless steel | magimix.com.au |
| 140 | 74 | 68 | 80 | 68 | 83 | 51 | 3:27 | 1.5 | 1.12 | 22 | | Removable | Stainless steel | morphyrichards.com.au |
| 100 | 73 | 83 | 60 | 77 | 82 | 63 | 3:12 | 1.7 | 1.14 | 16 | | Hinged | Stainless steel/glass | breville.com.au |
| 80 | 73 | 82 | 60 | 79 | 82 | 60 | 3:08 | 1.5 | 0.99 | 15 | | Hinged | Stainless steel | sunbeam.com.au |
| 169 | 72 | 83 | 60 | 72 | 77 | 63 | 3:20 | 1.7 | 1.15 | 15 | 6 | Hinged | Stainless steel | cuisinart.com.au |
| 109 | 72 | 80 | 60 | 75 | 84 | 60 | 3:15 | 1.6 | 1.03 | 15 | | Hinged | Painted | kenwood-australia.com |
| 130 | 71 | 76 | 60 | 80 | 82 | 61 | 3:06 | 1.7 | 1.08 | 14 | | Hinged | Stainless steel/glass | russellhobbs.com.au |
| 100 | 70 | 76 | 60 | 77 | 83 | 60 | 3:12 | 1.5 | 1.05 | 21 | 4 | Removable | Painted metal | sunbeam.com.au |
| 100 | 70 | 75 | 60 | 81 | 83 | 61 | 3:05 | 1.7 | 1.04 | 20 | | Removable | Stainless steel | breville.com.au |
| 50 | 70 | 76 | 60 | 73 | 85 | 63 | 3:18 | 1.7 | 0.79 | 16 | | Hinged | Painted | kambrook.com.au |
| 100 | 70 | 74 | 60 | 79 | 83 | 63 | 3:08 | 1.5 | 1.28 | 16 | | Removable | Painted | raco.com.au |
| 50 | 70 | 73 | 60 | 83 | 83 | 63 | 3:01 | 1.7 | 0.82 | 17 | | Hinged | Stainless steel | russellhobbs.com.au |
| 100 | 69 | 73 | 60 | 70 | 85 | 64 | 3:23 | 1.8 | 1.02 | 21 | | Removable | Painted metal | russellhobbs.com.au |
| 150 | 68 | 67 | 60 | 82 | 85 | 60 | 3:04 | 1.5 | 1.19 | 18 | | Removable | Painted | cookwarebrands.com.au |
| 160 | 68 | 73 | 60 | 67 | 81 | 61 | 3:28 | 1.7 | 1.17 | 17 | | Hinged | Stainless steel/glass | morphyrichards.com.au |
| 106 | 67 | 70 | 60 | 68 | 83 | 61 | 3:27 | 1.7 | 0.81 | 19 | | Removable | Plastic | delonghi.com.au |
| 99 | 65 | 68 | 60 | 55 | 86 | 60 | 4:33 | 1.1 | 1.13 | 15 | | Hinged | Plastic | bodum.com |
| 50 | 65 | 65 | 60 | 70 | 84 | 62 | 3:23 | 1.7 | 0.84 | 20 | | Removable | Painted metal | kambrook.com.au |
| 30 | 68 | 65 | 60 | 95 | 83 | 63 | 2:30 | 2.4 | 0.63 | 21 | | Removable | Stainless steel | raco.com.au |
| 85 | 67 | 67 | 60 | 95 | 71 | 64 | 2:44 | 2.5 | 1.15 | 20 | | Removable | Enamel | cookwarebrands.com.au |
| 189 | 66 | 63 | 60 | 95 | 72 | 64 | 2:39 | 2.1 | 1.68 | 21 | | Removable | Enamel | lecreuset.com.au |
| 119 | 62 | 53 | 60 | 95 | 76 | 63 | 2:35 | 3.0 | 1.41 | 21 | | Removable | Enamel | cuisinart.com.au |

**USING THE TABLE**

**Price** Recommended retail, as of December 2013. **Scores** The overall score is made up of ease of use (40%), noise (40%), boil performance (10%) and energy efficiency (10%). **Noise** For comparison, a typical conversation is carried out at about 60dB, while city traffic is measured at around 80dB. **Energy efficiency** Based on energy used to boil one litre of water. **Features** See What to Look For, page 54.

**TABLE NOTES**

• Newly tested. All kettles made in China except the Circulon, Le Creuset and Cuisinart stovetop kettles (Thailand).

## Nutshell

- Eleven new vacuum cleaners and five new robot vacs on test.
- Robot vacs are improving, but they're basically still hard floor sweepers rather than carpet cleaners.

# Auto or manual?

Robot vacuums can help keep hard floors clean, but to clean carpet you'll still need to use a standard vac, says **Chris Barnes**

If you're shopping for a new vacuum cleaner, you may be wondering whether to join the robot revolution or stick with a conventional barrel or upright model. The decision rests mainly on these questions: (1) do you have a lot of carpet in your home, and (2) how clean do you want to keep it? If you answered (1) yes, and (2) very, then a conventional vac is for you.

### Uprights & barrels

Our tests show that for cleaning carpet – actually extracting the dirt from deep in the pile, as opposed to just taking the dust and fluff off the top – a standard barrel or upright vacuum cleaner is your only real option. Robots and stick vacs just can't match most standard vacs in this regard. And while the very best models for cleaning carpet (the Sebo Airbelt K3 Premium and Sebo Felix) are also among the most expensive, we've found several mid-priced models that are not too far behind them (see opposite).

It's important to give your carpet a regular and thorough clean, and to protect it from wear and tear caused by dirt gradually abrading the pile. But if you have mainly hard floors, you may find that a cheap model – or a robot – is all you need.

The table (page 58) lists all the currently available models we've tested that score at least very well overall, plus all newly tested models. Results for all other previously tested models can be found at **choice.com.au/vacuumcleaners**

### Robots

Perhaps not surprisingly, robot vacuum cleaners continue to grow in popularity. More and more brands have entered the market, and our latest test includes new models from iRobot, LG, Samsung, Philips and Hoover.

But these robots should really only be considered floor sweepers, as most can only manage to extract a tiny amount of dirt from carpet. That said, the newly tested LG Roboking Square is the first robot we've tested to pick up more than 30% of the dirt from carpet. That's a poor performance compared to standard vacs – on average, most barrel and upright models we test pick up at least 60%, and the best pick up 90% or more – but it gives hope that perhaps one day we'll find a robot vacuum that cleans carpet reasonably well.

We also recommend the LG and the iRobot Roomba 780 for their performance on hard floors, cleaning along edges and picking up pet hair.

## PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

### BARREL/UPRIGHT VACS

| | |
|---|---|
| **88% Sebo** Airbelt K3 Premium (Feb 12) | $1099 |
| **83% Miele** S8 Cat & Dog S8320 (Nov 13) | $699 |
| **82% Electrolux** Ultra One S Bag Z8870P (Feb 12) | $799 |
| **82% Miele** S8790 HEPA Silence (Jul 13) | $899 |
| **82% Sauber** Intelligence SI-200 (Mar 13) | $1599 |
| **82% Sebo** Felix Premium (Oct 12) | $999 |
| **81% Nilfisk** Extreme X150 (Jul 13) | $599 |
| **81% Bosch** Free'e Animal BSGL5244AU (Oct 12) | $549 |
| **81% Miele** Compact Cat & Dog S6320 (Jun 12) | $499 |
| **80% Electrolux** Ultra Captic ZUC4103DEL (Nov 13) | $899 |
| **80% Miele** S2111 (Aug 11) | $299 |
| **80% Vax** Zen 2 Pet VCZP1600 (Jun 12) | $379 |

### ROBOT VACS

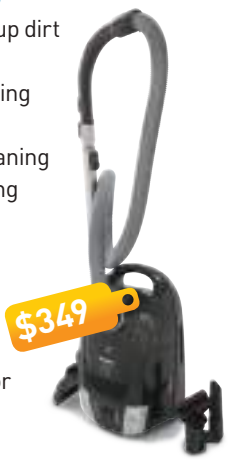
| | |
|---|---|
| **69% iRobot** Roomba 630 (Jul 13) | $599 |

(Month and year in brackets refers to issue of *CHOICE* in which vac was first profiled)

# WHAT TO BUY

## VACUUM CLEANERS

### 84%
### Miele S6210 Compact




#### Good points
- Good at picking up dirt from carpet
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- Very good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Telescopic wand
- Variable power
- Good range of tools with on-board storage for all of them

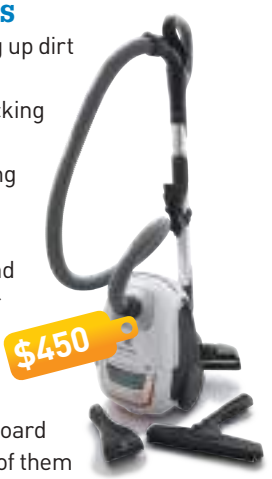
#### Bad points
- None to mention

### 82%
### Miele S8310*

#### Good points
- Good at picking up dirt from carpet
- Very good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Excellent at removing pet hair
- Good range of tools with on-board storage for all of them
- Variable power
- Excellent reach from the power point
- Excellent bag is easy to remove and replace

#### Bad points
- The cleaning head is tiring to move over the carpet

### 80%
### Electrolux Ultra Silencer Animal Care ZUS4065PET




#### Good points
- Good at picking up dirt from carpet
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- Good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Telescopic wand
- Variable power
- Washable HEPA filter
- Good range of tools with on-board storage for all of them
- Very long power cord

#### Bad points
- None to mention

## ROBOT VACS

### 74%
### LG Roboking Square VR6270LVMB

#### Good points
- Excellent at cleaning hard floor, along edges and at picking up pet hair
- Automatic return to charging station just before the battery goes flat
- Stairs detection
- Very quiet operation

#### Bad points
- Poor at picking up dirt from carpet

### 71%
### iRobot Roomba 780

#### Good points
- Excellent at cleaning hard floor, along edges and at picking up pet hair
- Automatic return to charging station just before the battery goes flat
- Stairs detection

#### Bad points
- Very poor at picking up dirt from carpet

## ABOUT THE REST

### UPRIGHT/BARREL VACS

Most other models on test are let down by only OK dirt removal dirt from carpet. However, the **Samsung** and **Volta** models are inexpensive and worth considering if you have mostly hard floors. The **Hoover Mode 5000PH** is good at cleaning carpet but only borderline at cleaning corners and edges. The **Vax Mach 1 VMBG2000** is borderline at cleaning carpet, while the **Dyson DC54 Multi Floor** has disappointingly low scores for cleaning carpet and cleaning corners and edges.

### ROBOT VACS

The **Samsung Navibot Light SR8751** is excellent at cleaning hard floors, but only OK at picking up pet hair and poor at cleaning along edges. The **Philips** is excellent at cleaning hard floors and along edges, but is very poor at picking up pet hair. The **Hoover Robby 5240** is good at cleaning hard floors but poor at cleaning edges and picking up pet hair.

*THE MIELE S8310 WAS PREVIOUSLY TESTED IN *CHOICE* NOV 13, BUT WAS NOT PROFILED DUE TO SPACE CONSTRAINTS. IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

| | | | | PERFORMANCE | | | | | | FEATURES | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BARREL/UPRIGHT VACS | Price ($) | Annual running costs ($) | Cost per bag ($) | Overall score | Dirt removal from carpet score (%) | Ease of use score (%) | Cleaning corners and edges score (%) | Pet hair removal score (%) | Noise (dB) | Carpet and hard floor head / power head / turbo brush / hard floor tool | Crevice / upholstery tool / dusting brush | On-board storage |
| **Sebo** Airbelt K3 Premium | 1099 | 21.63 | 4.13 | 88 | 92 | 82 | 80 | 100 | 71 | ✓/✓/–/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| • **Miele** S6210 Compact | 349 | 23.90 | 4.50 | 84 | 78 | 82 | 85 | 100 | 70 | ✓/–/–/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Miele** S8 Cat & Dog S8320 | 699 | 24.10 | 3.60 | 83 | 79 | 81 | 80 | 100 | 73 | ✓/–/✓/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Electrolux** Ultra One S-Bag Z8870P | 799 | 22.45 | 4.32 | 82 | 80 | 76 | 80 | 100 | 68 | –/✓/–/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Miele** S8310 | 499 | 26.60 | 3.60 | 82 | 76 | 79 | 85 | 100 | 70 | ✓/–/–/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Miele** S8790 HEPA Silence | 899 | 18.00 | 3.60 | 82 | 75 | 82 | 85 | 100 | 69 | ✓/–/✓/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Sauber** Intelligence SI-200 | 1599 | 17.00 | 4.25 | 82 | 78 | 80 | 78 | 100 | 64 | ✓/✓/–/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓(2) |
| **Sebo** Felix Premium | 999 | 13.47 | 3.00 | 82 | 90 | 66 | 75 | 100 | 74 | –/✓/–/✓ | ✓/✓/– | ✓ |
| **Bosch** Free'e Animal BSGL5244AU | 549 | 27.06 | 4.25 | 81 | 74 | 82 | 79 | 100 | 73 | ✓/–/✓/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓(1) |
| **Miele** Compact Cat & Dog S6320 | 499 | 23.64 | 5.50 | 81 | 74 | 79 | 85 | 100 | 70 | ✓/–/✓/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Nilfisk** Extreme X150 | 599 | 22.00 | 6.00 | 81 | 75 | 77 | 85 | 100 | 66 | ✓/–/–/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Electrolux** Ultra Captic ZUC4103DEL | 899 | 17.20 | na | 80 | 74 | 79 | 80 | 100 | 70 | –/✓/–/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| • **Electrolux** Ultra Silencer Animal Care ZUS4065PET | 450 | 17.60 | 4.25 | 80 | 75 | 82 | 71 | 100 | 57 | ✓/–/✓(mini)/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Miele** S2111 | 299 | 19.74 | 4.99 | 80 | 76 | 80 | 82 | 90 | 70 | ✓/–/–/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| **Vax** Zen 2 Pet VCZP1600 | 379 | 19.74 | na | 80 | 72 | 81 | 80 | 100 | 70 | ✓/–/✓/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| • **Philips** PowerPro Active FC8635/71 | 279 | 21.00 | na | 74 | 59 | 74 | 85 | 100 | 70 | ✓/–/–/– | ✓/✓/– | ✓ |
| • **Hoover** Mode 5000PH | 499 | 17.40 | 4.25 | 73 | 72 | 72 | 50 | 100 | 67 | ✓/✓/–/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓(1) |
| • **Samsung** Air Track SC4350 | 149 | 20.00 | na | 73 | 61 | 73 | 76 | 100 | 72 | ✓/–/–/– | ✓/–/✓ | |
| • **Volta** Sierra U4020 | 220 | 21.90 | na | 72 | 56 | 75 | 81 | 100 | 70 | ✓/–/✓/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓(1) |
| • **Volta** Ultima Pet Plus U6011 | 220 | 22.30 | 2.60 | 72 | 53 | 78 | 81 | 100 | 77 | ✓/–/✓/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| • **Volta** Aptica Animal Care UTT7930WP | 219 | 18.70 | na | 71 | 61 | 74 | 75 | 90 | 76 | ✓/–/✓(mini)/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | |
| • **Nilfisk** Combat Ultra 12404901 | 219 | 21.40 | na | 70 | 58 | 76 | 70 | 90 | 73 | ✓/–/–/✓ | ✓/–/✓ | ✓ |
| • **Vax** Mach 1 VMBG2000 | 149 | 22.60 | 4.00 | 68 | 48 | 80 | 75 | 90 | 74 | ✓/–/–/✓ | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |
| • **Dyson** DC54 Multi Floor | 799 | 17.00 | na | 65 | 50 | 78 | 56 | 90 | 73 | ✓/–/–/– | ✓/✓/✓ | ✓ |

| | | PERFORMANCE | | | | | | FEATURES | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ROBOT VACS | Price ($) | Overall score | Hard floor dirt pick-up performance (%) | Dirt removal from carpet (%) | Cleaning corners and edges score (%) | Pet hair removal score (%) | Noise measured on carpet / Hard floor (dB) | Suction | Side brush | Remote control | Programmable operation times | Virtual wall |
| • **LG** Roboking Square VR6270LVMB | 929 | 74 | 93 | 32 | 90 | 90 | 54 / 55 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | One program/day | |
| • **iRobot** Roomba 780 | 1199 | 71 | 96 | 17 | 90 | 90 | 61 / 65 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 program/day | ✓ |
| **iRobot** Roomba 630 | 599 | 69 | 94 | 19 | 80 | 90 | 62 / 66 | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| **LG** Roboking VR5906LM | 649 | 58 | 88 | 6 | 80 | 60 | 52 / 59 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Two, six and 12 hours delay | |
| • **Samsung** Navibot Light SR8751 | 599 | 56 | 94 | 11 | 40 | 60 | 57 / 63 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| • **Philips** Easy Star FC8802 | 399 | 54 | 96 | 2 | 90 | 10 | 60 / 65 | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| **Samsung** Navibot S SR8980 | 1299 | 52 | 80 | 6 | 50 | 70 | 51 / 63 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | One program/day | ✓(2) |
| **Hoover** ROBO.COM2 RCB009 | 499 | 46 | 78 | 4 | 40 | 50 | 56 / 62 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | One program/day | ✓ |
| • **Hoover** Robby 5240 | 249 | 45 | 79 | 8 | 40 | 30 | 65 / 70 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | One program/day | ✓ |
| **Neato** Pet and Allergy Vacuum XV-21 | 699 | 45 | 83 | 9 | 30 | 30 | 66 / 70 | ✓ | | | One program/day | ✓ |
| **Home Hero** Robot Vacuum Cleaner M-688 | 199 | 39 | 68 | 4 | 40 | 30 | 61 / 66 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | One program/day | ✓ |
| **Airflo** Intelligence Robotic Cleaner AFV740 | 299 | 38 | 66 | 9 | 30 | 30 | 66 / 72 | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

For details of how we test conventional and robot vacs, go to **choice.com.au/vacuumcleaners**

| SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable suction control | Variable power | HEPA filter | Dust bag full indicator or clear bin | Blower facility | Type | Dust collector | Power measured (W) | Dust collector volume (L) | Reach from power point (m) | Weight (kg) | Country of manufacture | Contact |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1600 | 1.9 | 9.6 | 9.8 | Germany | sebo.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1770 | 2.9 | 9.8 | 6.2 | Germany | miele.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1780 | 3 | 11 | 7.5 | Germany | miele.com.au |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1660 | 3 | 12 | 10 | Hungary | electrolux.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1970 | 3 | 11 | 7.2 | Germany | miele.com.au |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1330 | 3 | 11 | 7.6 | Germany | miele.com.au |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Barrel | Bag | 1260 | 2.6 | 12.5 | 9.4 | Slovenia | godfreys.com.au |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Upright | Bag | 1000 | 3 | 11 | 7.4 | Germany | sebo.com.au |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 2000 | 1.5 | 15 | 7 | Germany | boschappliances.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1750 | 2.4 | 9.6 | 6.5 | Germany | miele.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1630 | 2.8 | 10.3 | 10.1 | Hungary | nilfsk-advance.com.au |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bin | 1270 | 1.2 | 10 | 9.9 | Hungary | electrolux.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1300 | 2.1 | 12 | 7.9 | Hungary | electrolux.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1460 | 2.8 | 8.4 | 5.8 | Germany | miele.com.au |
| ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bin | 1460 | 2.2 | 11.3 | 8.1 | China | vax.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bin | 1550 | 1.6 | 9 | 6.6 | China | philips.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1290 | 2 | 8 | 8.3 | China | hooverfloorcare.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | Barrel | Bin | 1480 | 0.8 | 8.6 | 5.6 | Vietnam | samsung.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bin | 1620 | 1.1 | 8.6 | 6.8 | China | electrolux.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1650 | 2.8 | 8.8 | 6.8 | China | electrolux.com.au |
| ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bin | 1380 | 1.2 | 9.4 | 6.3 | China | electrolux.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | Barrel | Bin | 1580 | 1.4 | 9.2 | 7.1 | China | nilfsk-advance.com.au |
| ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | Barrel | Bag | 1670 | 3.5 | 8.0 | 6.3 | China | vax.com.au |
| ✓ | | | ✓ | | Barrel | Bin | 1260 | 0.6 | 9.6 | 7.6 | Malaysia | dyson.com.au |

**USING THE TABLE** **Price** Recommended retail, as of December 2013. **Annual running costs** are based on one hour's use per week at 26c/kWh. **Scores** The overall score is made up of dirt removal from carpet (40%), ease of use (30%), cleaning corners and edges (15%) and pet hair removal (15%). All models scored 100% in the scratch test. **Noise** For comparison, a typical conversation is carried out at about 60dB, while city traffic is measured at around 80dB. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested

| SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Remote control functions | Battery type | Charge time (h) | Operation time – max (min) | Weight (kg) | Contact |
| Repeat, zigzag, cell by cell, spot, "my space", turbo, return to charger, directions. | Li-ion 14.8 V | 3 | 110 | 3.1 | lg.com.au |
| Spot, clean, directions. | NiMH 14.4 V | 3 | 90 | 3.9 | irobot.com.au |
| | NiMH 14.4 V | 1 | 60 | 3.7 | irobot.com.au |
| Charging, directions, spot, zigzag. | Li-ion 16.8 V | 3 | 70 | 3.2 | lg.com.au |
| Auto, turbo, directions, spot, return to charger. | NiMH 14.4 V | 2 | 110 | 3.4 | samsung.com.au |
| | NiMH 14.4 V | 4 | 65 | 1.5 | philips.com.au |
| Auto, spot, directions, manual, turbo, dust sensor. | Li-ion 14.4 V | 3 | 100 | 3.2 | samsung.com.au |
| Auto, spot, directions, time setting, return to charger, UV lamp. | NiMH 14.4 V | ns | 150 | 3.3 | godfreys.com.au |
| Auto, turbo, directions. | NiMH 14.4 V | 6 | 60 | 2.8 | hooverfloorcare.com.au |
| | NiMH 14.4 V | 3 | 40 | 3.8 | aurobo.com.au |
| Auto, turbo, directions. | NiMH 14.4 V | 6 | 110 | 2.8 | godfreys.com.au |
| Charge, directions. | NiMH 14.4 V | 8 | 60 | 3.3 | airflo.com.au |

**USING THE TABLE** **Price** Recommended retail, as of December 2013. **Scores** The overall score is made up of hard floor dirt pick-up (40%), dirt removal from carpet (30%), cleaning corners and edges (15%) and pet hair removal (15%). Ease of use is not scored. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested.

# New-wave thinking

We're making it easier for you to check and compare washing machine brand reliability, as **Matthew Steen** explains

Brand reliability is a key factor of product quality, and something that's taken very seriously by CHOICE members. So in our washers table (page 62), we now include the most recent brand reliability and loyalty scores as collected from our annual member survey (see page 40). This will make it easier for you to compare brands' reliability at a glance.

Some manufacturers such as Haier, Hoover and Beko don't have a score, because not enough members have owned these brands for us to compile and publish accurate data. This usually means such brands are relatively new to the market.

We've also carried out a product use survey, something we do every few years. This tells us whether we're on the right track when it comes to testing that accurately reflects how our members use their appliances. In terms of washers, we've discovered just over half of the members surveyed own a front loader, and use cold water and a normal wash cycle. Most people wash for stains involving sweat and dirt, and just over half don't use pre-stain removal products or soakers.

## Nutshell

- Eighteen new washers on test, one of which is recommended.
- Brand reliability and loyalty scores now feature in our table, making it easier for you to find and compare.

The Siemens WM16Y890AU is the first washer we've tested to use an auto-dosing feature, which is new to machines in Australia (see *CHOICE* Dec 13/Jan 14). Overall it scores well, and is only let down slightly by its rinse performance and spin efficiency. Check the table for more details.

## HOW WE TEST

Our lab testers subject all washing machines to the same round of rigorous tests. First, using a normal cold-water wash cycle, they test each machine to see how it shifts tough stains from specially prepared cloths that have been attached to a standard wash-set of linen.

After the wash cycle has finished, the testers use a special machine (spectrophotometer) to examine every cloth to see how much light is reflected from each stain, which allows them to calculate how much dirt has been removed. This machine is more sensitive than the human eye: differences of six per cent or more in the dirt removal scores are visible.

As well as dirt removal and rinse performance, we score machines on:

- gentleness
- spin efficiency, and
- water efficiency.

Since most Australians wash in cold water, we apply a small penalty in our overall score to models that can't do a proper cold wash (about 20°C) on their "normal" cycle.

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

**Woollens cycle** (machine-/handwashable) programs relate to the instructions on the garment itself, advising whether it's machine-washable or for handwash only. Washers with a tick for handwash say this program is gentle enough for handwash-only items.

**Out-of-balance correction** automatically detects and redistributes an out-of-balance load, either by spinning slowly before the full spin cycle or taking in more water (which is what most top loaders do). If you're concerned about high water usage, opt for a machine without this feature or buy a front loader, which is less likely to go out of balance than a top loader.

**Selectable spin speed** allows you to change the spin speed on some programs. A higher spin speed will result in drier clothes (good when using a dryer), while a lower speed is helpful for delicates or fabrics that crease easily.

**Auto-sensing water level** optimises water, energy and time by automatically adjusting the water level according to the load and/or fabric type. Some machines also adjust the washing action.

**Extra rinse** can be useful for people sensitive to detergents, as it adds an extra rinse stage to the washing program.

**Tap connection** If you only have a cold water tap in your laundry, choosing a front loader means you can still wash in warm or hot water when needed, as the machine will heat the water. If you want to take advantage of less expensive hot water systems, such as solar, look for a machine connected to hot and cold water. Be aware, however, that most front loaders with a hot and cold connection only draw hot water when the wash temperature is set to 60°C.

**Favourite program** lets you program your preferred wash option for future use at the touch of a button.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

# WHAT TO BUY

CHOICE recommends front loaders that score at least 80% overall and 80% for dirt removal. For those who prefer top loaders, we recommend those that score at least 70% overall and 70% for dirt removal. We don't recommend any machines with less than 55% in any score. There are other performers in the table that are good options.

## PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

### FRONT LOADER

| | |
|---|---|
| **82% LG** WD14024D6 (8kg) (Sep 13) | $1149 |
| **82% Samsung** WF1804WPC (8kg) (Jun 13) | $899 |
| **82% Samsung** WF756UMSAWQ (7.5kg) (Jun 13) | $1099 |
| **81% LG** WD12021D6 (7kg) (Sep 13) | $849 |
| **81% LG** WD14130D6 (8.5kg) (Dec 13/Jan 14) | $1409 |
| **80% Bosch** WAP24160AU (7kg) (Sep 13) | $1129 |

### TOP LOADER

| | |
|---|---|
| **74% Fisher & Paykel** WL1068P1 (10kg) (Jun 13) | $1349 |
| **73% Midea** MB45 (4.5kg) (Jun 13) | $329 |

(Month and year in brackets refers to the *CHOICE* issue with full What to Buy profile)

| | | COSTS | | PERFORMANCE | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Price ($) | Running costs ($ / 10 years) | Overall score (%) | Dirt removal score (%) | Rinse performance score (%) | Gentleness score (%) | Water efficiency score (%) | Spin efficiency score (%) |
| FRONT LOADERS | **LG** WD14024D6 | 1149 | 626 | 82 | 80 | 89 | 73 | 87 | 81 |
| | **Samsung** WF1804WPC | 899 | 624 | 82 | 82 | 88 | 76 | 83 | 74 |
| | **Samsung** WF756UMSAWQ | 1099 | 548 | 82 | 82 | 95 | 69 | 82 | 74 |
| | **LG** WD12021D6 | 849 | 795 | 81 | 82 | 96 | 65 | 76 | 77 |
| | • **LG** WD14130D6 | 1409 | 632 | 81 | 80 | 86 | 70 | 87 | 80 |
| | **Miele** W5873 | 2599 | 524 | 81 | 79 | 89 | 73 | 84 | 77 |
| | **Bosch** WAP24160AU | 1129 | 815 | 80 | 82 | 98 | 69 | 71 | 70 |
| | **Electrolux** EWF12832 | 1059 | 539 | 80 | 79 | 86 | 72 | 87 | 72 |
| | • **Electrolux** EWF14742 | 1029 | 543 | 80 | 79 | 83 | 70 | 87 | 78 |
| | • **Fisher & Paykel** WH7560J1 | 1059 | 575 | 80 | 79 | 94 | 70 | 81 | 70 |
| | • **LG** WD14070SD6 | 2029 | 673 | 80 | 79 | 92 | 68 | 78 | 77 |
| | **Samsung** WF1752WPC | 799 | 567 | 80 | 77 | 89 | 71 | 86 | 74 |
| | **Asko** W6444 | 1499 | 648 | 79 | 76 | 94 | 70 | 76 | 76 |
| | **Asko** W6884 | 1899 | 932 | 79 | 80 | 98 | 67 | 60 | 80 |
| | • **Fisher & Paykel** WH8560J1 | 999 | 679 | 79 | 79 | 96 | 67 | 76 | 70 |
| | **Hoover** VHD8144D | 799 | 556 | 79 | 77 | 87 | 71 | 85 | 74 |
| | **Miele** W1913 | 1599 | 492 | 79 | 76 | 88 | 72 | 85 | 72 |
| | **Miele** W5741 | 1899 | 433 | 79 | 79 | 80 | 72 | 89 | 73 |
| | **Miele** W5903 | 2199 | 541 | 79 | 81 | 83 | 71 | 90 | 74 |
| | • **Samsung** WF1104XAC | 2029 | 639 | 79 | 78 | 94 | 69 | 76 | 74 |
| | • **Samsung** WF1702XEC | 999 | 609 | 79 | 81 | 93 | 68 | 76 | 65 |
| | • **Electrolux** EWF14912 | 1529 | 609 | 78 | 75 | 83 | 71 | 87 | 75 |
| | • **AEG** L77480FL | 1499 | 519 | 77 | 72 | 86 | 72 | 84 | 77 |
| | • **Beko** WMB81641LC | 1029 | 619 | 77 | 77 | 87 | 68 | 77 | 69 |
| | • **Bosch** WAE24463AU | 1149 | 743 | 77 | 72 | 95 | 72 | 72 | 72 |
| | • **Simpson** SWF10732 | 1409 | 534 | 77 | 72 | 89 | 75 | 84 | 67 |
| | • **Siemens** WM16Y890AU | 2799 | 439 | 76 | 82 | 64 | 70 | 90 | 69 |
| TOP LOADERS | **Fisher & Paykel** WL1068PI | 1349 | 846 | 74 | 73 | 95 | 64 | 57 | 73 |
| | **LG** WT-R10856 | 1599 | 932 | 73 | 80 | 95 | 46 | 55 | 66 |
| | **Midea** MB45 | 329 | 731 | 73 | 77 | 88 | 59 | 66 | 55 |
| | **Haier** HWMP55-918 | 429 | 755 | 71 | 79 | 89 | 42 | 70 | 50 |
| | **Simpson** SWT801 | 1059 | 867 | 71 | 77 | 92 | 45 | 57 | 66 |
| | **Haier** HWMP65-918 | 549 | 808 | 70 | 75 | 79 | 51 | 69 | 58 |
| | **Fisher & Paykel** WL80T65CW2 | 1189 | 891 | 69 | 66 | 96 | 53 | 53 | 75 |
| | **Simpson** SWT604 | 739 | 792 | 69 | 72 | 89 | 47 | 64 | 56 |
| | **Fisher & Paykel** WA80T65FW1 | 1029 | 1217 | 68 | 67 | 98 | 67 | 27 | 72 |
| | **LG** WT-H550 | 749 | 995 | 68 | 68 | 96 | 71 | 40 | 53 |
| | • **LG** WF-T6571 | 1149 | 1075 | 66 | 70 | 91 | 55 | 39 | 55 |
| | • **LG** WT-H750 | 1029 | 896 | 65 | 62 | 95 | 63 | 47 | 51 |
| | • **Samsung** WA455DRHDWR | 1059 | 1164 | 65 | 66 | 93 | 55 | 34 | 71 |
| | • **Samsung** WA80F5G4 | 1099 | 1115 | 64 | 65 | 95 | 60 | 32 | 49 |
| | • **Speed Queen** AWNA62 | 1409 | 1605 | 59 | 54 | 97 | 63 | 16 | 57 |

**USING THE TABLE Price** Recommended or average retail, as of March 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of dirt removal (40%), rinse performance (20%), gentleness (15%), water efficiency (15%) and spin efficiency (10%). **Cold wash penalty** As most Australians now wash in cold water straight from the tap, we have applied a small penalty in our overall score to models that cannot do a proper cold wash (at about 20°C) on the normal cycle. While the higher wash temperature may slightly increase a machine's scores for dirt removal and rinse effectiveness, it also means it's using more energy than it would if it were able to do a true cold wash; our penalty compensates for this. **Dirt removal** More accurate than the human eye, a spectrophotometer is used to measure this – differences of about six per cent are visible. **Features** See What to Look For, page 61, for details. **Tap connection** Some machines need both hot and cold water to operate. Others connect to cold water only and may need a special connector or sealing cap for the hot water inlet. A machine with a heater can be particularly useful if you connect to cold only, as it still gives you the option of a warm or hot wash. But a dual-connection front loader connected to solar hot water can be more efficient when doing warm or hot washes. **Dimensions** are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, as stated by the manufacturer. **Running costs** This is an estimate of how much it will cost for water and electricity over 10 years if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a normal cycle, based on 26c/kWh of electricity and $2 per 1000L for water. Some machines still draw power when the machine is connected to a power source but not in use, so switch off the machine at the power point when not in use. The running costs don't include detergent, which is the largest ongoing cost of running a washing machine. **Brand reliability and loyalty** Where we have data, these scores are taken directly from our brand reliability survey (see page 40), but do not add to the overall score. These scores refer to the brand only, not that particular model. Differences of three per cent or more between brands are significant. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. * Cold = cold tap water (20°C). **na** Not available.

| | | | BRAND | | FEATURES | | | | | | | SPECIFICATIONS | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Water used (L, normal cycle) | Cycle time (min, normal wash) | Noise (dB) | Brand reliability (%) | Brand loyalty (%) | Woollens cycle (machine / hand washable) | Out-of-balance correction | Selectable spin speed | Auto-sensing water level | Extra rinse | Tap connection | Coldest wash temperature for normal wash (°C)* | Capacity (kg) | Claimed dimensions (cm, H x W x D) | Contact |
| 44 | 121 | 62 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 8 | 85 x 60 x 64 | lg.com.au |
| 50 | 105 | 61 | 82 | 94 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C rec | Cold | 8 | 85 x 60 x 67 | samsung.com.au |
| 53 | 120 | 60 | 82 | 94 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 7.5 | 85 x 60 x 60 | samsung.com.au |
| 64 | 131 | 57 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | H & C | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 55 | lg.com.au |
| 43 | 125 | 55 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 8.5 | 85 x 60 x 64 | lg.com.au |
| 49 | 84 | 58 | 92 | 96 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | H & C | Cold | 8 | 85 x 60 x 62 | miele.com.au |
| 73 | 139 | 61 | 91 | 96 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C rec | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 60 | bosch.com.au |
| 44 | 107 | 64 | 86 | 88 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 8 | 85 x 60 x 67 | electrolux.com.au |
| 44 | 110 | 65 | 86 | 88 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 59 | electrolux.com.au |
| 54 | 126 | 60 | 84 | 89 | -/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 7.5 | 85 x 60 x 59 | fp.com.au |
| 59 | 109 | 56 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 10 | 85 x 60 x 64 | lg.com.au |
| 46 | 113 | 62 | 82 | 94 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 7.5 | 85 x 60 x 67 | samsung.com.au |
| 63 | 96 | 70 | 85 | 91 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 59 | asko.com.au |
| 92 | 137 | 65 | 85 | 91 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 59 | asko.com.au |
| 64 | 127 | 57 | 84 | 89 | -/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 8.5 | 85 x 60 x 65 | fp.com.au |
| 47 | 68 | 69 | na | 91 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | C only | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 52 | andico.com.au |
| 48 | 81 | 64 | 92 | 96 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 66 | miele.com.au |
| 39 | 83 | 61 | 92 | 96 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 7.5 | 85 x 60 x 62 | miele.com.au |
| 39 | 82 | 59 | 92 | 96 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | 30 | 7.5 | 85 x 60 x 62 | miele.com.au |
| 63 | 110 | 59 | 82 | 94 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 10 | 85 x 60 x 60 | samsung.com.au |
| 63 | 116 | 64 | 82 | 94 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 45 | samsung.com.au |
| 44 | 110 | 60 | 86 | 88 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 9 | 85 x 60 x 67 | electrolux.com.au |
| 48 | 71 | 62 | na | na | ✓/✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C rec | Cold | 8 | 85 x 61 x 64 | aegaustralia.com.au |
| 62 | 87 | 62 | na | na | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | C only | Cold | 8 | 84 x 60 x 59 | beko.com.au |
| 70 | 91 | 64 | 91 | 96 | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 59 | bosch.com.au |
| 49 | 93 | 66 | 83 | 84 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | C only | Cold | 7 | 85 x 60 x 56 | simpson.com.au |
| 38 | 116 | 54 | na | na | ✓/✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | C only | Cold | 8 | 85 x 60 x 59 | siemens-home.com.au |
| 98 | 52 | 58 | 84 | 89 | -/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | H & C | Cold | 10 | 106 x 69 x 70 | fp.com.au |
| 102 | 83 | 56 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 10 | 116 x 69 x 76 | lg.com.au |
| 82 | 59 | 57 | na | na | -/- | ✓ | | ✓ | | H & C | Cold | 4.5 | 92 x 53 x 54 | mideabrand.com |
| 73 | 99 | 62 | na | na | ✓/- | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 5.5 | 90 x 53 x 52 | haierlife.com.au |
| 98 | 104 | 58 | 83 | 84 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 8 | 107 x 67 x 68 | simpson.com.au |
| 75 | 103 | 58 | na | na | ✓/- | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 6.5 | 96 x 56 x 55 | haierlife.com.au |
| 105 | 60 | 57 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | H & C | Cold | 8 | 102 x 65 x 65 | fp.com.au |
| 84 | 66 | 58 | 83 | 84 | ✓/- | ✓ | | | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 6 | 102 x 60 x 64 | simpson.com.au |
| 152 | 49 | 63 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | H & C | Cold | 8 | 102 x 65 x 65 | fp.com.au |
| 127 | 68 | 55 | 84 | 89 | -/- | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 5.5 | 94 x 54 x 54 | lg.com.au |
| 130 | 54 | 58 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | | | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 6.5 | 93 x 59 x 61 | lg.com.au |
| 115 | 48 | 55 | 84 | 89 | ✓/- | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 7.5 | 100 x 62 x 64 | lg.com.au |
| 139 | 72 | 56 | 82 | 94 | -/- | ✓ | ✓ | | | H & C | Cold | 10 | 112 x 69 x75 | samsung.com.au |
| 143 | 63 | 52 | 82 | 94 | -/- | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | H & C | Cold | 8 | 110 x 61 x 68 | samsung.com.au |
| 171 | 41 | 58 | na | na | -/- | ✓ | | | | H & C | Cold | 7 | 110 x 66 x 72 | kleenmaid.com.au |

# Reading the fine print

Ebook fans have never had it so good, with the latest generation of e-readers lasting longer, performing faster and costing less, says **Denis Gallagher**

The growing popularity of tablets is influencing e-reader design for the better. All but one of the e-readers on test use a touchscreen, with page turns and menu access done by tapping or swiping your finger on or across the screen in much the same way as a tablet.

E-readers use an e-ink display to simulate the appearance of a paper book. Unlike other devices such as laptops and tablets, they don't need a backlight. This means less strain on your eyes and good readability even in direct sunlight. E-ink e-readers display an image or page of text without using any power until the screen is refreshed by turning to the next page. So battery life for these products is measured in months, not hours.

## Tablets are great, but...

Tablet fans may be surprised by their poor performance compared with e-readers, particularly given the latest generation of e-readers have adopted the touchscreen interface that made tablets such a big hit.

But to be clear on what this test is about, we measure the overall experience when reading an ebook, not how easy it is to update a Facebook status or how fantastic a video looks on the HD

## Nutshell

- All models on test support wireless networking, making book downloads easier and faster.
- Kindle and Kobo dominate the e-reader market in Australia.

resolution screen. Once a backlit screen is introduced to a device it becomes very difficult to deliver an ideal reading experience, particularly when viewing the screen for several hours, which is often the case when reading an ebook.

If you want a tablet as your primary device but would like to read the occasional ebook, the Apple iPad mini or Google Nexus 7 provides a comfortable platform and lower price compared to the larger, more expensive tablet devices.

The Kindle Fire HDX and HD and Kobo Arc HD are second-generation tablets with an e-reader focus, delivering an HD resolution screen. However, while both brands use the Google Android OS, the Kindle devices have their own Fire 3.0 overlay application that forces the reader to stay within the world of Amazon, with limited access to Google applications. The Kobo Arc HD, on the other hand, can access Google's Play store to run apps in much the same way as any other Android tablet or smartphone.

The Kindle option may appeal if you want to use your tablet mainly to read books with some emailing, web browsing, Facebook and so on while still using a laptop or PC. The Kobo Arc HD should appeal to those who only want one electronic device.

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

## GOOD TO KNOW

### Bedtime reading

E-readers using e-ink deliver the best reading experience you can have with an electronic device. But you'll have to deal with the same issues as with a paper book when reading in poor light. Our tester looked at the optional book lights available for the Kindle and Sony e-readers without a backlight feature and found they weren't great. If you already have a book light for your paper-based books, consider using that instead.

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### Charging options

Most e-readers come with a USB cable only and no charger. While the argument in the past may have been that the device is being charged when connected to the PC or laptop, that's no longer the case. Being wireless means you no longer need to constantly connect to the laptop or PC to add more ebooks. A USB power adapter provides more flexibility for charging and is crucial if you use a tablet, as battery life is measured in hours compared with e-ink e-reader batteries that can last for a month or longer. Also, don't assume you can use any USB charger around the home as some work and some don't, particularly Apple iPhone or iPod chargers when used on a Kindle.

### What ebooks do you read?

If you like to buy the latest releases as soon as they hit the shelves, your main file format options are EPUB with digital rights management, available on many online bookstores, or Amazon's AZW file format. The Amazon bookstore has a variety of new titles, and the wireless purchase and instant downloading of ebook titles is efficient. The Amazon Kindle app is also available on PC, Mac (OSX/iOS) and Android devices, so you can read your ebooks on multiple devices if you're logged in to the same account.

Hundreds of thousands of book titles are available online for free, including well-known classics in the EPUB, TXT or HTML formats, to read and share on other ebook devices. Amazon copped some flack for initially charging for these freely available titles, but reacted to user demand and they're now free on the Amazon store too. You'll find 30,000 titles for Kindle, including classics such as *The Great Gatsby*, works by Jane Austen and Emily Brontë, and children's classics.

If you want to borrow ebooks from the local library, consider the Sony PRS-T3, which lets you download library ebooks directly using the embedded Overdrive application. This saves you the time and hassle of downloading the ebook to your PC and then transferring it to the device. And if you've bought an ebook and want to read it on a device that supports another format, visit calibre-ebook.com This app converts your ebook from one file format to one supported on your e-reader.

# WHAT TO BUY

## 77%
## Kobo Aura HD

### Good points

- Very easy to buy books online
- Good rating for bedroom (low-light) reading
- Best on test for reading outdoors
- Front-lit screen option allows you to read in low light

### Bad points

- While the e-reader has a lighting feature, there is no ambient light sensor or lighting presets
- Lighting can be uneven, especially near the screen edges

## 74%
## Kindle Paperwhite

### Good points

- Very easy to purchase books online
- Very easy to purchase books over Wi-Fi
- Very good rating for indoor reading – high-contrast screen
- Front-lit screen option allows you to read in low light

### Bad points

- While the e-reader has a lighting feature, there is no ambient light sensor or lighting presets
- Lighting can be uneven, especially near the screen edges

## 72%
## Kobo Glo

### Good points

- Storage can be expanded by adding a removable microSD card
- Very easy to purchase books over Wi-Fi
- Glo feature allows you to read in low light
- Very good rating for reading ebooks outdoors

### Bad points

- Lighting can be uneven, especially near the screen edges

| | | PERFORMANCE | | | | | | | FEATURES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Overall readability | | | | | | | | | | | File formats supported | | | | | | | | |
| | Price ($) | Overall score (%) | Ease of use (%) | Online purchasing (%) | Indoor (%) | Outdoor (%) | Bedroom (low-light) (%) | Stated battery life | Landscape / portrait mode | Markup / handwriting annotation | Speaker | Microphone | Headphones (3.5mm) | Removable storage (MicroSD) | EPUB | AZW (Kindle) | MOBI | HTML | RTF | DOC | BMP | TIF | Power adapter included |
| **E-INK E-READERS** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • **Kobo** Aura HD | 220 | 77 | 81 | 83 | 60 | 90 | 70 | 2 months | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| **Kindle** Paperwhite (A) | 160 | 74 | 73 | 83 | 80 | 78 | 50 | 2 months | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| **Kobo** Glo | 160 | 72 | 81 | 75 | 60 | 71 | 65 | 1 month | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| **Kindle** | 98 | 71 | 68 | 83 | 60 | 78 | 60 | 1 month | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| • **Sony** PRS-T3 | 149 | 71 | 79 | 65 | 60 | 89 | 60 | 2 months | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| **Kobo** mini | 100 | 69 | 82 | 75 | 60 | 71 | 50 | 1 month | | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| **Kobo** Touch | 130 | 68 | 81 | 65 | 60 | 71 | 60 | 1 month | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| **TABLETS** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Apple** iPad mini | 479 | 68 | 76 | 80 | 50 | 37 | 90 | 10 hours | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Google** Nexus 7C | 349 | 67 | 79 | 80 | 50 | 40 | 70 | 10 hours | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| • **Kobo** Arc 7HD | 250 | 66 | 71 | 83 | 50 | 33 | 85 | 8 hours | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Apple** iPad | 649 | 65 | 66 | 80 | 50 | 33 | 90 | 10 hours | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| • **Kindle** Fire HD | 199 | 62 | 74 | 83 | 50 | 33 | 55 | 10 hours | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| • **Kindle** Fire HDX 8.9 | 499 | 61 | 71 | 83 | 50 | 33 | 55 | 12 hours | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Kobo** Arc | 300 | 60 | 72 | 75 | 50 | 30 | 60 | 10 hours | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

## 71%
## Kindle

### Good points
- Very easy to purchase books over Wi-Fi
- Good rating for reading outdoors
- Most affordable e-reader on test

### Bad points
- Only model on test without a touchscreen so you must use buttons to make selections and turn pages

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK/THINKSTOCK

## 71%
## Sony PRS-T3

### Good points
- Very good for reading an ebook outdoors
- Overdrive support within the device allows ebooks to be downloaded directly from a library to the e-reader (you don't need a PC at all)
- Storage can be expanded by adding a microSD card

### Bad points
- Unlike e-readers with an illumination feature built in, the Sony requires a book light (optional extra purchase) to read in low light

### ABOUT THE REST

The **Kobo mini** is the smallest and lightest device on test and truly pocket sized, making it a good option for the work commute. However, the smaller display size makes it difficult to read in low light compared with most of the other models on test.

The **Kobo Touch** is easy to use and its overall performance is OK across a variety of lighting conditions. However, if you don't need the backlight, you may want to consider the **Sony** instead.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

| Touchscreen | Screen type* | Screen size (in) | Resolution (pixels) | Internal storage capacity (GB) | Operating system | Weight (g) | Dimensions (mm, H x W x D) | Contact |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ | e-ink Pearl with light | 6.7 | 1440 x 1080 | 4 | na | 243 | 176 x 128.5 x 11.5 | kobo.com |
| ✓ | e-ink Paperwhite with light | 5.9 | 1024 x 768 | 2 | na | 209 | 169 x 117 x 9 | kindle.com |
| ✓ | e-ink with light | 5.9 | 1024 x 768 | 2 | na | 183 | 157.5 x 114 x 10.5 | kobo.com |
| | e-ink | 5.9 | 800 x 600 | 2 | na | 168 | 166 x 114.5 x 8.5 | kindle.com |
| ✓ | e-ink Pearl | 5.9 | 1024 x 758 | 2 | na | 200 | 160 x 109 x 12 | sony.com.au |
| ✓ | e-ink | 4.9 | 800 x 600 | 2 | na | 132 | 133.5 x 102 x 10.5 | kobo.com |
| ✓ | e-ink Pearl | 5.9 | 800 x 600 | 2 | na | 195 | 165 x 114 x 10 | kobo.com |
| ✓ | IPS | 7.9 | 1024 x 768 | 32 | iOS 7.0.6 | 306 | 200 x 135 x 7.5 | apple.com.au |
| ✓ | IPS | 6.9 | 1280 x 800 | 32 | Android 4.2.2 | 343 | 196 x 119.5 x 11 | google.com |
| ✓ | IPS | 7 | 1920 x 1200 | 16 | Android | 342 | 194 x 122 x 10 | kobo.com |
| ✓ | IPS | 9.7 | 2048 x 1536 | 32 | iOS 7.0.6 | 655 | 242 x 186 x 9.5 | apple.com.au |
| ✓ | IPS | 7 | 1280 x 800 | 8 | Fire OS 3.0 | 343 | 191 x 128 x 11 | kindle.com |
| ✓ | IPS | 8.9 | 2560 x 1600 | 16 | Fire OS 3.0 | 372 | 230 x 157.5 x 8 | kindle.com |
| ✓ | IPS | 7 | 1280 x 800 | 32 | Android 4 | 362 | 188.5 x 120 x 12 | kobo.com |

**TABLE NOTES** All ebook readers by default ship with an electronic version of the manual available on the device. All support multiple font styles and sizes and all include an online dictionary. All devices except the Kindles support Adobe Digital Editions, a program for organising and preparing ebooks, digital newspapers, and other digital publications to be used on an electronic device. All the e-readers with e-ink lack a local power pack, while all the tablet devices include a power pack. All charge via USB connection. All models are made in China except the Kobo mini and Touch (made in Taiwan). **Price** Recommended retail, as of March 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of overall readability (50%; indoor/outdoor/night lighting), ease of use (25%) and online purchasing/lending (25%). **Files supported** All models on test support .txt, pdf, .jpg, .gif and .png. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. **(A)** The Kindle Paperwhite is also available in a 3G version ($228), where online purchases can be made and ebooks downloaded outside Wi-Fi areas so long as there is a 3G phone network signal available. This service is included in the price of the e-reader, and the user is not charged for any data transfers to use this service. * All e-ink e-readers support 16 grayscale levels. **In-plane switching (IPS)** screens exhibit wide viewing angles and good colour reproduction. **na** Not applicable.

Top-bottom: Tobias Dunn, Pierre-Louis and Roman, and Johanne Rossi

# Highland fling

Did this fully featured Hyundai win over our CHOICE member family?

CHOICE members Johanne Rossi and Tobias Dunn and their two sons Pierre-Louis (13) and Roman (5) tried out the Hyundai ix35 Highlander, using it for a weekend of domestic duties. The car on test was the top-of-the-range 2L diesel AWD, a five-seater with six-speed automatic transmission and manual mode option. A 2.0L 2WD and a 2.4L AWD petrol engine are also available.

## The family says

The child seat anchors are easy to locate on the back of the seats, and when you need to fold the seat forward to fit a bike in, moving the child seat from the passenger side to the centre is simple. When the child seat was in the middle, Pierre-Louis found it very difficult to put on his seat belt – he had to push the child seat to find where to lock it in. We all felt the middle seat is too narrow. While Roman didn't have any legroom issues, Pierre-Louis' knees nudged the back of the driver's seat when it was pushed all the way back.

The boot is quite wide and deep, although we couldn't fit an adult bike (with front wheel off) standing up as we're used to. (However we could easily fit a kid's scooter standing up.)

We liked how many features were included in the price, including push-button start, auto lights, foldable side mirrors, reversing sensors and cameras, lumbar support in the seats, seat heating, double sun roof, connection options and GPS. We also liked the dual-control air conditioning, particularly how it can blow onto and cool down the steering wheel after you've been parked in the sun. We would've preferred the controls to be toward the top of the steering wheel rather than the bottom.

On the downside, there is limited rear visibility, especially with a child seat in the back. We found the gearbox quite hard and a bit rough to go from park to drive or drive to reverse. We would've also liked to see sensors at the front (the rear ones are great), as it's quite a high car and we couldn't really tell where the car ends at the front. We also didn't like how long it takes to brake.

## CHOICE says

Steering is a bit lifeless and feels disconnected from the road. The six-speed auto works well, although the ride is too firm so you'll feel every bump in the road. Seating is flat and fairly hard, but reasonably supportive.

Engine noise isn't really an issue when driving on good roads, but there's a bit of noise coming via the pillars and mirrors at high speeds on the freeway. Under strong acceleration, the engine does get noisy and has the usual rattle at idle that diesel engines tend to show.

The ix35 has a reasonably pleasant interior and good-sized cargo space, as the rear seats fold almost flat. Visibility is only OK, with the pillars restricting visibility through the rear.

## The verdict

While there were a few niggling things Johanne and Tobias didn't like about the Hyundai ix35, overall they would buy this car. Our tester found it a firm but pleasant car to drive, with good performance and very good economy for a larger model. ■

MATTHEW STEEN

**HYUNDAI ix35 HIGHLANDER AWD 2L DIESEL**

**PRICE** $40,490 (base model from $27,990)
**CONTACT** hyundai.com.au
**ANCAP SAFETY RATING** 5 star

**7.2L vs 6.6L**
Fuel usage claim vs measured per 100km

# The winners are...

**Chris Ruggles** selects the best from more than 80 TVs in our latest test

We've screened 81 TVs to bring you the best of the best. While all those in the table (overleaf) are good overall and we recommend them, only the newly tested TVs are profiled here. You can find profiles and more details on each TV in previous issues of *CHOICE* (Aug 13, Sep 13, Nov 13 and Dec 13/Jan 14).

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## WHAT TO BUY

### LARGE

### 1 76%
### LG 60LA8600, $3439

#### Good points
- Very good Blu-ray and EPG scores
- USB record and playback easy to use
- Has DLNA, which is very easy to use
- Internet is easy to use, especially via additional "magic" remote
- Four HDMI and three USB ports
- Has mobile high-definition link (MHL)

#### Bad points
- No Facebook or Twitter app
- No HDMI ports are easily accessible from the front when wall mounted

### 2 75%
### Sony KDL50W700A, $998

#### Good points
- Very good Blu-ray, HD broadcast, photo viewing and EPG scores
- Supports USB record and playback
- DLNA functionality is very easy to use
- Easy-to-use browser and apps
- Supports Wi-Fi, Wi-Fi Direct, Bluetooth and MHL
- Four HDMI ports

#### Bad points
- No HDMI ports are easily accessible when wall mounted
- No headphone port

### 3 71%
### Samsung UA55F6700, $1996

#### Good points
- Very good Blu-ray viewing and energy efficiency scores
- Recognises voice commands

#### Bad points
- No headphone port

### 4 70%
### Samsung PS51F5000, $879

#### Good points
- Excellent viewing angles score

#### Bad points
- No headphone port

### 5 70%
### Panasonic TH-L55DT60A, $2145

#### Good points
- USB record and playback and DLNA functionality are very easy to use
- Browser and apps are easy to use
- Three HDMI ports, all easily accessible when wall mounted
- Three USB ports

#### Bad points
- No headphone port

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

## WHAT TO BUY (CONT'D)

### MEDIUM

**72%**

**Samsung UA40F6800**

**Good points**

- Very good sound
- Recognises voice commands

**Bad points**

- No headphone port

**72%**

**Sony KDL40R450A**

**Good points**

- Has mobile high-definition link (MHL)

**Bad points**

- No swivel
- Borderline viewing angle score
- Very good EPG score

### SMALL

**75%**

**Samsung UA32F6400**

**Good points**

- Very good Blu-ray and HD broadcast viewing scores
- DLNA functionality is very easy to use
- Easy-to-use browser and apps
- Four HDMI ports (three easily accessible when wall mounted)
- Comes with additional touchpad remote control

**Bad points**

- Record to USB didn't work for us
- Composite and component inputs are mutually exclusive
- No headphone port

**71%**

**Samsung UA32F5000**

**Good points**

- Very good DVD/SD viewing score

**Bad points**

- No headphones output or swivel
- On-board controls are at the rear
- Borderline viewing angle score

**USING THE TABLE** All TVs on test have a 12-month warranty, and all LCD TVs have LED backlighting. **Prices** are recommended retail as supplied by manufacturers as of November 2013, or taken from a major retailer. In either case, you can probably find better by shopping around. **Scores** The overall score is made up of broadcast TV picture (25%), DVD/SD (20%), Blu-ray (15%), ease of use (20%), sound quality (10%), energy (5%), and viewing angle (5%). DVR, EPG, Smart TV and 3D scores aren't included in the overall score. **Dimensions** are rounded up to the nearest centimetre or half centimetre, with base included. **HDMI (total / easy)** is the total number of connections and those easily reached when the TV is wall mounted. **TABLE NOTES na** Not applicable. **L** LCD. **P** Plasma. **SG** Semi-gloss. **G** Gloss. **M** Matt.

To find out how we test, log on to **choice.com.au/TVs**

| | | | PERFORMANCE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Screen size (cm) | Price ($) | Overall score (%) | Broadcast TV picture quality (%) |
| **LARGE** | | | | |
| • **LG** 60LA8600 | 152 | 3439 | 76 | 79 |
| **Samsung** UA55F8000 | 138 | 4199 | 75 | 79 |
| • **Sony** KDL50W700A | 126 | 998 | 75 | 80 |
| **Panasonic** TH-L55ET60A | 139 | 1800 | 74 | 72 |
| **Sony** KDL50R550A | 126 | 1999 | 74 | 81 |
| **Panasonic** TH-L50E6A | 126 | 1448 | 73 | 73 |
| **Sony** KDL55W900A | 139 | 3599 | 73 | 77 |
| **Sony** KD-55X9004A | 140 | 5999 | 72 | 75 |
| **Panasonic** TH-P50ST60A | 127 | 1439 | 71 | 68 |
| • **Samsung** UA55F6700 | 140 | 1996 | 71 | 70 |
| **LG** 50LA6620 | 126 | 2199 | 70 | 67 |
| **Panasonic** TH-L50ET60A | 127 | 1899 | 70 | 69 |
| • **Panasonic** TH-L55DT60A | 140 | 2145 | 70 | 69 |
| • **Samsung** PS51F5000 | 129 | 879 | 70 | 73 |
| **Samsung** UA50F6400 | 127 | 1430 | 70 | 73 |
| **Samsung** UA55F7100 | 140 | 3299 | 70 | 72 |
| **MEDIUM** | | | | |
| **Sony** KDL47W800A | 119 | 1721 | 76 | 75 |
| **Panasonic** TH-L42E6A | 107 | 811 | 72 | 72 |
| • **Samsung** UA40F6800 | 102 | 1188 | 72 | 70 |
| • **Sony** KDL40R450A | 102 | 799 | 72 | 79 |
| **LG** 47LA6620 | 119 | 2099 | 71 | 70 |
| **Sony** KDL46W900A | 117 | 2795 | 71 | 73 |
| **LG** 42LA6230 | 107 | 1174 | 70 | 68 |
| **LG** 42LA6620 | 106 | 1349 | 70 | 73 |
| **Panasonic** TH-L47WT60A | 119 | 3499 | 70 | 69 |
| **Samsung** UA40F6400 | 102 | 1179 | 70 | 72 |
| **SMALL** | | | | |
| • **Samsung** UA32F6400 | 80 | 639 | 75 | 85 |
| **Samsung** UA32F5500 | 81 | 540 | 72 | 77 |
| **LG** 32LA6230 | 80 | 698 | 71 | 78 |
| • **Samsung** UA32F5000 | 80 | 415 | 71 | 71 |
| **Samsung** UA32F4000 | 80 | 419 | 70 | 72 |

| | | | | | | | | | | FEATURES | | | | | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DVD/SD picture quality (%) | Blu-ray picture quality (%) | Ease of use (%) | Sound quality (%) | Energy (%) | Viewing angle (%) | DVR (%) | EPG (%) | Smart TV (%) | 3D (%) | Stand swivel | Bluetooth | Wi-Fi | DLNA | Browser | Display type | Screen surface | Screen resolution (pixels) | Weight with stand (kg) | Dimensions (cm, H x W x D) | Stars | Annual energy use (kWh) | HDMI (total / easy) | Country of manufacture | Contact |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 73 | 88 | 74 | 68 | 80 | 60 | 76 | 80 | 78 | 75 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 33.3 | 85 x 134 x 32 | 6 | 314 | 4 / 0 | Indonesia | lge.com.au |
| 80 | 82 | 68 | 63 | 79 | 70 | 70 | 80 | 79 | 60 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | G | 1920 x 1080 | 18.4 | 74 x 122.5 x 31 | 5.5 | 283 | 4 / 1 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| 79 | 85 | 69 | 63 | 76 | 50 | 68 | 80 | 77 | na | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 17.3 | 70 x 114 x 30 | 5 | 272 | 4 / 0 | Malaysia | sony.com.au |
| 77 | 82 | 74 | 57 | 80 | 80 | 81 | 80 | 77 | 75 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | G | 1920 x 1080 | 24.5 | 78 x 124 x 30 | 6 | 261 | 3 / 3 | Malaysia | panasonic.com.au |
| 69 | 84 | 67 | 71 | 74 | 60 | na | 80 | 48 | 75 | | | ✓ | | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 18.1 | 70 x 113.5 x 23 | 4.5 | 290 | 4 / 2 | China | sony.com.au |
| 67 | 86 | 73 | 61 | 75 | 75 | 81 | 80 | 77 | na | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 20.1 | 71 x 112 x 27.5 | 6 | 215 | 3 / 0 | Malaysia | panasonic.com.au |
| 66 | 82 | 69 | 74 | 77 | 60 | 69 | 80 | 76 | 70 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | G | 1920 x 1080 | 21.3 | 75.5 x 124 x 30 | 5.5 | 305 | 4 / 0 | Malaysia | sony.com.au |
| 69 | 75 | 69 | 79 | 62 | 60 | 69 | 80 | 74 | 65 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 3840 x 2160 | 34.5 | 78.5 x 146.5 x 40 | 2.5 | 596 | 4 / 1 | Malaysia | sony.com.au |
| 67 | 77 | 74 | 68 | 64 | 90 | 81 | 80 | 77 | 60 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | P | G | 1920 x 1080 | 25.2 | 75 x 117 x 29.5 | 3 | 448 | 3 / 3 | Thailand | panasonic.com.au |
| 66 | 80 | 70 | 76 | 80 | 60 | 71 | 90 | 79 | 70 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 18.0 | 79 x 123 x 31 | 5.5 | 278 | 4 / 3 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| 66 | 73 | 73 | 77 | 80 | 55 | 71 | 80 | 72 | 70 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 19.8 | 73.5 x 113 x 32 | 6 | 223 | 3 / 3 | Indonesia | lge.com.au |
| 79 | 66 | 75 | 51 | 79 | 65 | 79 | 90 | 79 | 70 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 19.5 | 71.5 x 112.5 x 28 | 5.5 | 240 | 3 / 3 | Malaysia | panasonic.com.au |
| 70 | 77 | 72 | 58 | 79 | 70 | 81 | 85 | 79 | 70 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | G | 1920 x 1080 | 26.1 | 81.5 x 123.5 x 28 | 5.5 | 291 | 3 / 3 | Malaysia | panasonic.com.au |
| 68 | 68 | 70 | 58 | 64 | 90 | na | 90 | na | na | ✓ | | | | | P | G | 1920 x 1080 | 19.6 | 80 x 118.5 x 31 | 2.5 | 465 | 2 / 2 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| 64 | 70 | 70 | 80 | 76 | 55 | 71 | 90 | 79 | 30 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 15.1 | 74 x 113 x 31 | 5 | 278 | 4 / 3 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| 63 | 70 | 70 | 81 | 80 | 50 | 71 | 90 | 79 | 30 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | G | 1920 x 1080 | 16.5 | 78.5 x 122.5 x 31 | 6 | 271 | 4 / 3 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 79 | 85 | 69 | 62 | 75 | 90 | 68 | 80 | 74 | 70 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 16.1 | 67 x 108.5 x 30 | 5 | 256 | 4 / 1 | Malaysia | sony.com.au |
| 70 | 80 | 73 | 62 | 81 | 70 | 80 | 80 | 80 | na | | | ✓ | ✓ | | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 14.5 | 62 x 96 x 22 | 6 | 161 | 3 / 0 | Malaysia | panasonic.com.au |
| 74 | 74 | 70 | 80 | 70 | 70 | 71 | 90 | 79 | 70 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 9.3 | 59.5 x 95.5 x 20 | 4 | 238 | 4 / 3 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| 65 | 78 | 66 | 78 | 72 | 50 | na | 80 | na | na | | | | | | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 7.6 | 56.5 x 92.5 x 18 | 4.5 | 215 | 2 / 1 | China | sony.com.au |
| 68 | 75 | 73 | 73 | 77 | 60 | 71 | 80 | 72 | 70 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 15.6 | 70 x 107 x 32 | 5.5 | 228 | 3 / 3 | South Korea | lge.com.au |
| 66 | 79 | 69 | 71 | 72 | 60 | 69 | 80 | 76 | 75 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | G | 1920 x 1080 | 16.8 | 65 x 105 x 30 | 4.5 | 279 | 4 / 0 | Malaysia | sony.com.au |
| 72 | 71 | 72 | 60 | 75 | 75 | 73 | 70 | 72 | 70 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | M | 1920 x 1080 | 11.7 | 63.5 x 96.5 x 29.5 | 5 | 193 | 3 / 3 | South Korea | lge.com.au |
| 67 | 63 | 73 | 72 | 75 | 70 | 71 | 80 | 72 | 75 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 11.8 | 63.5 x 95.5 x 29.5 | 5 | 207 | 3 / 3 | South Korea | lge.com.au |
| 78 | 68 | 73 | 51 | 70 | 65 | 79 | 90 | 79 | 70 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | G | 1920 x 1080 | 16.5 | 72 x 106 x 35.5 | 4 | 310 | 3 / 3 | Malaysia | panasonic.com.au |
| 70 | 71 | 66 | 68 | 70 | 70 | 68 | 70 | 79 | 60 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 9.9 | 61 x 93 x 27 | 4 | 231 | 4 / 3 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 73 | 81 | 68 | 66 | 68 | 60 | 28 | 70 | 79 | 70 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 6.2 | 51 x 74 x 27 | 3.5 | 177 | 4 / 3 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| 74 | 76 | 71 | 62 | 73 | 55 | 71 | 90 | 80 | na | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 10.8 | 51 x 74 x 26.5 | 4.5 | 144 | 3 / 2 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| 65 | 64 | 73 | 72 | 71 | 70 | 74 | 80 | 72 | 60 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 7.8 | 50 x 74 x 24.5 | 4 | 153 | 3 / 3 | South Korea | lge.com.au |
| 76 | 76 | 68 | 71 | 72 | 50 | na | 70 | na | na | | | | | | L | SG | 1920 x 1080 | 5.6 | 51 x 74 x 19.5 | 4.5 | 144 | 2 / 2 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |
| 72 | 72 | 67 | 60 | 79 | 60 | na | 70 | na | na | | | | | | L | SG | 1366 x 768 | 5.6 | 50.5 x 74 x 19 | 5.5 | 111 | 2 / 2 | Malaysia | samsung.com.au |

# Scream-free streaming

## Nutshell

- They're all easy to use, but some take a bit more effort to set up than others.
- Check your existing TV and home entertainment equipment – you may already have a streamer.

**Chris Ruggles** checks out the devices that make streaming media from a computer to your TV a breeze

If you don't have a smart TV with DLNA functionality (see opposite), a media hub or streamer is a simple way to get what you want to watch from your computer to your TV.

There are seven hubs or streamers in this test. But other devices can also do the job, including some PVRs, Blu-ray and DVD players, games consoles, Apple TV, Fetch TV box or even an up-to-date AV receiver with DLNA.

| | | PERFORMANCE | FEATURES & SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Price ($) | Ease of use score (%) | Annual energy cost ($) | Dimensions (mm, D x W x H) | Weight (kg)* | Internal HDD | Ethernet (10/100 Base T) / Gigabit (10/100/1000 Base T) | HDMI | Component RCA (R, G, B) | Composite RCA (R, W, Y) | RCA SPDIF | Toslink | Stereo RCA (out) | Micro USB |
| **WD** TV Live Streaming Media Player | 117 | 93 | 11.68 | 100 x 125 x 33 | 0.2 | | 1 / 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| **Panasonic** DMR-BWT835 | 699 | 89 | 19.86 | 250 x 430 x 65 | 2.9 | 1TB | 1 / 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **Popcorn Hour** A-400 Networked Media Jukebox | 289 | 87 | 14.68 | 169 x 182 x 62 | 1.3 | (A) | 0 / 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| **DXtreme** DX-480 | 169 | 86 | 6.00 | 187 x 230 x 70 | 1.0 | (B) | 0 / 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| **Dune** HD TV-303D | 279 | 84 | 13.47 | 144 x 172 x 38 | 0.4 | (C) | 0 / 1 | 1 | 1 (D) | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| **Mede8er** MED1000X3D | 329 | 81 | 6.16 | 184 x 230 x 61 | 1.0 | (A) | 0 / 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| **kaiser baas** Smart MediaPlayer for Android | 128 | 72 | 2.00 | 90 x 120 x 34 | 0.2 | | 1 / 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

**USING THE TABLE** All devices on test support 1080p video and have DLNA functionality and 802.11n Wi-Fi, but the Mede8er requires an optional dongle. **Prices** are what we paid in January 2014. **Energy cost** is kWh. **Weight** doesn't include a hard drive if it's not already installed. **Memory card reader** is SD/SDHC for those that have one. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Optional – 2.5- or 3.5-inch SATA. **(B)** Optional – 3.5-inch SATA. **(C)**

# WHAT TO BUY

## 93%
### WD TV Live Streaming Media Player

#### Good points
- Excellent ease of use
- Phone support available

#### Bad points
- No HDMI cable included
- Estimated annual energy cost is comparatively high

## 89%
### Panasonic DMR-BWT835

#### Good points
- Very good ease of use
- CHOICE Recommended PVR
- Phone support available
- One terabyte HDD fitted
- Memory card reader

#### Bad points
- Relatively expensive to buy
- No HDMI cable included
- Estimated annual energy cost is the highest on test
- A relatively limited list of files streamed
- It will only play content it has recorded to an external USB hard drive

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

| USB 2.0 | USB 3.0 | SATA | Memory card reader | Web browsing | Add hard drive (internal / external) | Contact |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 0 | 0 | | | –/✓ | wdc.com |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | ✓ | | –/✓ | panasonic.com.au |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | ✓ | | ✓/✓ | cloudmedia.com |
| 2 | 1 | 0 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | dxtreme.com.au |
| 1 | 1 | 0 | | | ✓/✓ | jayvee.com.au |
| 2 | 1 | 0 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓/✓ | mede8er.com |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | ✓ | ✓ | –/✓ | kaiserbaas.com |

calculated at five hours per day active and 19 hours per day on standby at 26c/ Optional – 2.5-inch SATA. **(D)** Requires a 3.5mm adapter, which is not supplied.

## ABOUT THE REST

The rest are relatively easy to use, but we had to reboot the **Popcorn Hour** to enable DLNA. This wasn't mentioned in the operating instructions.

The **DXtreme** can be used as a PVR and costs less than the **Panasonic**, but you'll have to supply a 3.5-inch SATA hard drive. We found fitting this wasn't simple. Also, it has its own browser called Casablanca, which isn't easy to use and doesn't come with instructions.

The **Dune** can take a 2.5-inch SATA drive, but doesn't support DLNA and there's no support via email or phone. You can report a problem via the website.

The **Mede8er** can take either a 2.5- or 3.5-inch SATA hard drive, but updating its firmware is difficult and you have to buy a separate Wi-Fi dongle if you want a wireless connection.

The **kaiser baas** is relatively cheap to run, but its initial setup failed for us and needed a factory reset to get it functioning. It has a "mouse mode" that's necessary for some actions, but is awkward to use. To get a DLNA connection you need to download a XBMC app from the website, but there's no mention of this in the instructions.

## What to look for

The **Digital Living Network Alliance (DLNA)** protocol was introduced in 2003 to simplify the process of sharing content around the home, letting connected devices "talk" to one another over a wireless or wired network.

The ability to **connect to your network directly** as well as with DLNA makes it easier to find files that don't have well-known extensions.

A good **remote control** has easy-to-read labelling and large, well-spaced buttons grouped logically.

The more **file types** supported the better. You never know when you might run across an .ogg file that will make your day.

A **hard drive** is handy for viewing files when your computer is off.

**Ethernet** (10/100 Base T) is a cable connection to your computer. **Gigabit** (10/100/1000 Base T) is a faster version, handy when dealing with large files.

**USB3** is a definite advantage with big files, but can also be helpful when transferring high-resolution files. All products on test support 1080p, but none supports 4K video.

An **SD/SDHC card reader** makes it easier to view home movies and photos.

**Wireless connections** ideally should end in an "n". The newer protocol "ac", which should deliver data faster, may take some time to reach these products. ■

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# Index


**Accommodation booking sites** Sep
Air conditioners
portable **Nov**
reverse-cycle **May, Oct**
Animal testing labelling May
Anti-wrinkle treatments Apr
Appliance reliability **Apr**
Australian Consumer Law Dec/Jan
AV receivers **Dec/Jan**

**Baby craft** **Oct**
Barbecues **Dec/Jan**
Barrel vacuum cleaners **Nov, Apr**
Bathroom cleaners **Aug**
Beard trimmers **Sep**
Beer, craft Feb
Bikes
buying guide Nov
electric **Feb**
Bisphenol A (BPA) May
Blenders **Aug**
Blood pressure monitors **Dec/Jan**
Blu-ray players **Aug**
Botox Apr
Bottled water Jun
BPAY View Oct
Brand loyalty **Apr**
Bread & preservatives Jun
Breadmakers **Nov**

**Camcorders** **Jun, Nov**
Cameras
action **Feb**
rugged **Oct**
SLR **Dec/Jan**
Car
dashboard cameras **Jul, Oct***
electric Aug
GPS **Dec/Jan**
finance Aug
keys, smart Feb
rental Sep
tyres **Jun, Dec/Jan**
used **Oct**
Ceiling fans **Sep**
CFLs (light bulbs) **Jun*, Oct***
Children's sports fees Jun
Chocolate (block) **Apr**
CHOICE Shonkys Nov, Dec/Jan*
Christmas
lights **Dec/Jan**
rip-offs Dec/Jan
Cleaning products (chemicals) Oct
Clothes dryers **May**
Clothing, ethical Feb
Cockroach killers **Nov**
Coconut oil Mar
Cold & flu medications Jul
Commission rebates May
Competitions Jul
Computers, tablet **Aug, Mar, Apr**
Contacting companies Nov
Cooktops, induction **Sep, Mar**
Corporate sponsorship Apr
Cosmetics
geo-blocking Dec/Jan
labelling May
Counterfeit goods Aug
Credit reporting Apr

**Dashboard cameras** **Jul**
Data share plans Jul
Dehumidifiers **Sep**
Dental care Sep
Diets, online Sep
Digital cameras **Oct, Dec/Jan***
Direct debit cancellation May
Dishwasher detergents **Oct**
Dishwashers **Aug, Nov, Mar**
Dishwashing liquids **Feb**
Doctors' tips Oct
Dryers, clothes **May**
Duty-free shopping Sep
DVRs **Feb**

**EDCs** May
Electric
bikes **Feb**
car Aug
heaters **Jun**
ovens **Jul, Apr**
toothbrushes **Jun**
E-readers **Jun, Apr**
Espresso machines **Sep, Feb**
Ethical clothing Feb
Extras (health) insurance Mar

**Fans, ceiling** **Sep**
Financial comparison sites Aug
First home saver accounts Feb
"Fit for purpose" goods Dec/Jan
Fitness
gadgets Mar
watches **Mar**
Food allergen labelling Oct
Food & drink
bread & preservatives Jun
chocolate (block) **Apr**
free-range ham & turkey Dec/Jan
frozen yoghurt chains Sep
fruit & vegetables Mar
gluten-free Apr
junk (marketing) Nov
labelling Oct, Nov
liquid breakfasts Jun
palm oil May
sausages Jul
takeaway meals Feb
weight-loss May
Foot care Feb
Franchises Aug
Free-range ham & turkey Dec/Jan
Freezers **Oct**
Fridges **Jul, Mar**
Frozen
pizza Feb
yoghurt chains Sep
Fruit & vegetables Mar
Frypans **Jun**

**Garden shredders** **Sep**
Garment steamers **Mar**
Geo-blocking, cosmetics Dec/Jan
Gluten-free foods Apr
GPS, in-car **Dec/Jan**
Gyms (24-hour) Aug

**Handheld**
blenders **Aug**
mixers **Aug**
Hard-to-contact companies Nov
Hayfever treatment Sep
Headphones **May**
Health
anti-wrinkle treatments Apr
botox Apr
chemicals (cleaning products) Oct
cold & flu medications Jul
dental care Sep
doctors' tips Oct
EDCs May
extras insurance Mar
foot care Feb
gyms (24-hour) Aug
hayfever treatment Sep
hospital infection rates Sep
insurance Jun, Jul, Sep*, Mar
medical procedures, bad Jun
pregnancy supplements Jul
prescription medicines May
screening Mar
travelling Dec/Jan
Healthy holidays Dec/Jan
Heaters, electric **Jun**
High chairs **May**
Home
& contents insurance Nov
rental May
theatre systems **Oct**
warranty insurance Mar
Honda CR-V **Jun**
Hospital infection rates Sep
Hyundai Highlander ix35 **Apr**

**Induction**
cooktops **Sep, Mar**
cookware **Feb**
Insurance discrimination
(mental health) Feb
extras Mar
health Jun, Jul, Sep*
health, extras Mar
home & contents Nov
home warranty Mar
life Oct
pet Apr
travel Dec/Jan
iPhone amplifiers **May**
Irons, steam Mar

**Juicers** **Oct**
Junk food marketing Nov

**Kettles** **May, Apr**
Kia Rondo **Feb**
Kitchen knives **Jun**

**Landline phones** **Aug**
Laptops, back to school Feb
Lawnmowers
battery/electric **Nov**
ride-on **Dec/Jan**
Life insurance Oct
Light bulbs (CFLs) **Dec/Jan**
Line trimmers **Sep**
Lint rollers **Aug**
Liquid breakfasts Jun

**Marketing, junk food** Nov
Media hubs **Apr**
Medical procedures, bad Jun
Men's shavers **Dec/Jan**
Mental health & insurance Feb
Microwaves **Feb**
Mitsubishi i-MiEV Aug
Mixers
benchtop **Aug**
handheld **Aug**
Money
car finance Aug
commission rebates May
credit reporting Apr
direct debit cancellation May
financial comparison sites Aug
first home saver accounts Feb
mortgages May
superannuation Jul, Apr
term deposits Jul
Mortgages May
Mosquito repellents **Dec/Jan**
MPs (government) Aug
Multi-function power tools **Feb**
MySuper Jul

**NBN** Jul
Next G/4G phones **Jul**
Novelty iPhone docks **May**

**Online**
diets Sep
financial comparison sites Aug
reviews Nov
shopping Aug
spectacles, buying Nov
Ovens, electric **Jul, Apr**
Overseas volunteering Mar

**Palm oil** May
Paper shredders **Feb**
Pet insurance Apr
Phones
cordless landline **Aug**
mobile (smart) **Mar**
Next G/4G **Jul**
Phoning overseas Oct
Pool cleaners **Nov**
Portable air conditioners **Nov**
Pregnancy supplements Jul
Prescription medicines May
Pressure cleaners **Mar**
Printers **Jul**
PV (solar) panels Jun*

**Rangehoods** **Jul**
Recycling Aug
Refrigerators – see Fridges
Renting (home) May
Reverse-cycle air conditioners **Nov**
Reviews, online Nov
Robot vacuum cleaners **Jul, Apr**

**Saucepans** **Jun**
Sausages Jul
Screening (health) Mar
Secateurs **Sep**
Sewing machines **Oct**
Shavers, men's **Dec/Jan**
Shonkys, The Nov, Dec/Jan*
Shopping centre layouts Dec/Jan
Showerheads **May**
Shredders, garden **Sep**
Slow cookers **May**
Smart car keys Feb
Smartphones **Sep, Mar**
Smash repairers Mar
Solar (PV) panels Jun*
Sony 4K TV **Dec/Jan**
Soundbars **Oct**
Speakers, wireless **May**
Spectacles, buying online Nov
Steam
mops Feb
stations **Mar**
Stick vacuums Nov
Streamers (media) **Apr**
Strollers **Jun**
Subaru Forester **Jul**
Superannuation Jul, Apr

**Tablet computers** **Aug, Mar, Apr**
Takeaway meals Feb
Tattoo removal Oct
Telephones – see Phones
Televisions – see TVs
Tents, small **Oct**
Term deposits Jul
Toasters **May, Apr**
Toothbrushes, electric **Jun**
Toyota RAV4 **Aug**
Travel
accommodation Sep
health Dec/Jan
insurance Dec/Jan
review sites Nov
TVs **Jun, Aug, Sep, Nov, Dec/Jan, Apr**
Tyres, car **Jun, Dec/Jan**

**Universal remotes** **Mar**
Upright vacuum cleaners **Nov, Apr**
Used car safety **Oct**
User-generated reviews Nov

**Vacuum cleaners**
barrel/upright **Jul, Nov, Apr**
robot **Jul, Apr**
stick **Nov**
Veterinary costs Jul
Volunteering abroad Mar

**Warranties** Dec/Jan
Washing clothes Sep
Washing machines **Jun, Sep, Dec/Jan*, Apr**
Water (bottled vs tap) Jun
Weight-loss foods May
Wireless speakers **May**

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## Small **LUXURIES**

It's certainly small, but we think calling this rubber dinghy a "luxury ship" is a bit rich.

## Just kidding?

This charger carries a particularly ominous warning for its users.

# HARD WORD

Thanks this month to eagle-eyed members Kylie Brown, Kelly Parkyn, Peter Chapman and Richard Baird. If you have any other examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.

Compiled by Siobahn Donohoe

SWIFT MEATS
Retail Butchery
Specials
Great Southern Pinnacle Rump Cap Steak $11.99
Great Southern Pinnacle Rump Cap Whole $10.99
Whole Tasmanian Eye Fillets $23.99
Runover Chickens... 3 flavours $3.99
King Island Roasts $6.50
Whole Ducks... Approx size #22 $13.99
FOR THE PETS
Leg Bones $1.49
Pure Beef Pets Mince $2.99
Pigs Ears Bags of 10 $15.00
SATURDAY & SUNDAY SPECIAL
Tomato and Basil Lamb Boneless Roast $7.99

## WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Swift Meats Butchery in Tassie is currently offering runover chickens in no less than three flavours! (Obviously not so swift, then.)

Discoveries
Experience zero gravity - fully reclined
Luxurious comfort and relaxation
- just select your position!
Reclining Zero Gravity Chair MSRC $499

## HEIGHT OF COMFORT

At first glance, $499 seems a bit steep for this homely piece of furniture. Factor in the ability to "experience zero gravity", though, and you'll probably be over the moon.

ISSN 0009 496X. Print post approved 100000729. Wholly printed in Australia by AIW Printing Pty Ltd, 26–30 Parsons Avenue, Springvale 3171 in 2014 for the publisher, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.